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DISCOVERIES IN ENGLAND

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BY

EMILE CAMMAERTS

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DISCOVERIES IN ENGLAND

INTRODUCTION

It is a singular mistake to imagine that the discovery of a country comes to an end when it has been crossed in all directions and when a series of explorers have succeeded in surveying its main geographical features. This notion may apply to the lonely wilds of the Tropics and the Poles, but it is totally inadequate when we turn our attention to densely-populated countries in which the landscape has been so strongly modified by the hand of man that it cannot be properly understood unless we penetrate into the jungle of social life and institutions, with its tangle of traditional and temperamental intricacies. While it is possible to say, more or less accurately, when the discovery of some desert has been completed, such an achievement can never be claimed with regard to a highly civilised country. For it would imply a full understanding of all the nation's economic, intellectual,

artistic and religious activity, and of aspects ranging from the picturesque perspective of a country lane to the highest flights of idealistic oratory. It would reach the most superficial and the most secret problems of everyday life, in town or country, among rich or poor. It would deal with an ever-changing scene which alters from place to place and from year to year.

The nearer the explorer believes the goal to be, the farther it appears to recede from him. It is not enough for him to accumulate documents and pile up statistics, for the life of a nation cannot be interpreted merely in the light of today or of three hundred years ago. The only chance of getting somewhere near the truth is to seize upon some central idea, around which the whole race seems to gravitate. What we casually call "national temperament" is a key which opens many doors and which, like all fairy gifts, is independent of time and fashion. If we could succeed in defining it, we should have access to the future as well as to the present and the past. For, though England, like all nations founded on a deep and powerful tradition, is bound to undergo important changes, there are certain national characteristics which may be considered permanent, or at least as enduring as European civilisation itself.

When travellers, speaking of a certain type of person, hearing a certain story or reading a certain book, exclaim: "How very English! or "How very French!" they understand one another perfectly. Even a superficial acquaintance with a few countries and their literature would allow them to interpret new experiences in the light of past impressions. Nations can be recognised in the same manner as old friends, and the safest course to follow in such matters is perhaps to accept the guidance of our instinct. But if we are asked to define this instinct and to say why this person, this anecdote or this book appears to us to be so typical of one or other country, we find it difficult to give a sensible answer. We feel that it must be so, or, as the French say, "Cela se sent."

The author does not for one moment imagine that he will be able to solve this problem. The riddle of one man's mind is puzzling enough to absorb a whole lifetime, and no one can boast of having reached the inner chamber of a nation's soul, which is obviously still more inaccessible. Any attempt to confine within rigid limits the general tendencies of a national character is doomed to failure. Like the rivers of England, the English temperament flows between definite banks; but these banks may at any time be flooded, so that their

outlines can only be recognised here and there by a row of dwarfed trees or the lowered archway of a bridge.

The best way for a foreigner to approach the subject is perhaps to register as faithfully as possible the series of impressions received in the course of his exploration of Great Britain,[1] with due insistence on those features which have caused him some surprise, but which, though new and startling to him, may seem old and obvious to a native. Without trying to be paradoxical, it may be suggested that those people who are most intimately in contact with their own country have greater difficulty in visualising its main aspects than those who, through various experiences abroad, are able by a series of comparisons to discriminate between the human and the purely national element.

There is, it is true, a certain unconscious knowledge of the land and its people which no stranger can hope to obtain. The mother-country is a jealous mother, who whispers her closest secrets only to her own children. There are certain

[1] With humble apologies to my Scottish and Welsh friends, I feel compelled to look upon this island as a whole. In spite of the legitimate claims of Scotland and Wales to a distinct national life, everything belonging to British culture is called English abroad, and though the word is technically wrong, it represents many things which the three peoples have in common. A Frenchman may allude to "l'industrie britannique," but he would not be understood if he mentioned "l'art ou la littérature britannique."

boundaries which the most sympathetic of outsiders could not and should not cross. In a certain sense, a country can only be appreciated by her own people, but, just as the mother of a family may have her home life and her social life, dividing her time between her house and the town or village in which she lives, and may therefore be judged from both points of view, so does a country possess, besides those hidden qualities which endear her to her children, some peculiar features which, in the eyes of a stranger, distinguish her from any other country. There is the inside view which is scarcely realised on account of its very familiarity, and the outside view which strikes the newcomer with surprise; there is the old secret which is taken for granted, and the new revelation which fills the mind with wonder.

In one of his essays, G. K. Chesterton tells us of a friend's visit to his flat in Battersea, on the eve of his departure for the continent. He was, at the time, busily engaged in packing his trunk, and, on being asked where he was going, answered, with a strap between his teeth: "To Battersea." Doubting his own ears or the writer's seriousness, his friend repeated the question, only to be told again and again, with increasing emphasis, that the goal of the journey was indeed Battersea. Finally the author,

emerging from his trunk, turned round and boomed in a voice of thunder that he was going to Battersea via Paris, Belfort, Heidelberg and Frankfort.

It is doubtful whether the truth underlying this story is generally appreciated. There are three types of traveller, two of which are frequently met with, while the third is regrettably rare. We know the people who go abroad, jealously preserving their national prejudices and making disparaging comparisons between their own country and the one which they are visiting. We also know the people who, from the time of their departure, assume a cosmopolitan outlook which prompts them to take the opposite view, and to praise everything foreign to the detriment of their homeland. But we do not so often meet the man who succeeds in combining a deep attachment for his own country with a keen interest and sympathy for that of others, and who realises that one of the greatest privileges of the traveller is to appreciate, on his return, the true value of the surroundings among which he has been living without, at the time, being aware of their deep significance and of the spiritual wealth which they contained. In this way, it is as true for a Londoner to say that all roads lead to London, as for a Roman to say that all roads lead to Rome.

It is no longer necessary for an author to apologise for venturing to write about a country other than his own. The worst that can be said against him is that he is following a new fashion. The number of learned books in which, of recent years, foreign authors have expressed their opinions on English life and problems is becoming so large that the idea of writing such books has lost all originality. But this is not a learned book, it is merely a short account of the difficulties that must face most foreigners who settle in this country, and of the means by which such difficulties may be gradually overcome and a certain amount of understanding achieved. It gives a somewhat halting record of the illusions, disillusions and well-rewarded efforts of an explorer who, after weaving many dreams around a mysterious island of which he had heard in his youth, succeeded in reaching that island at the age of thirty, and has since spent, among its lanes and streets, the better part of twenty years.

This record is valueless from a documentary point of view, for it does not take into account most of the important facts which dominate the life of England, as they dominate that of all great industrial countries. It is not even original, for most of the generalisations it contains have already

been developed more eloquently and convincingly by well-known writers in France, Germany and elsewhere. It is cynically personal and brazenly intimate. It would never have been written had not the author felt that the account of his own experience might perhaps be helpful to some foreigner placed in similar circumstances, and even to a few Englishmen who, cherishing the sweet delusion that their country's riddle is not difficult to solve, are apt to grow impatient with the lack of understanding that they so often meet abroad.

CHAPTER I

ROBINSON CRUSOE

THE first Englishman I ever met stepped out in the 'eighties from the pages of an illustrated book which I found, one happy morning, on the table in my nursery. He wore a high fur cap, and his body was wrapped in goatskins which, with the shaggy beard that hid part of his face, gave him a ferocious expression that the illustrator had vainly endeavoured to soften. He carried a hatchet at his side and a couple of guns slung across his shoulder. A large umbrella and various attendant animals, such as a dog, a cat and a bright parrot, added to the glamour of this picturesque equipment.

The book must have been an abridged version, "à l'usage de l'enfance," of Defoe's immortal story, for most of the hero's lengthy soliloquies on religion and morality had been removed, in order to quicken the pace of the tale. Enough however remained to give me a comprehensive and vivid view of Robinson Crusoe, who, from that day forth, became for me the ideal type of

adventurer—courageous, patient, as well as wise and just in his relations with the savages.

I had of course no notion that the author of my book was also a great political writer and one of the most outspoken novelists of the eighteenth century. I did not for one moment realise that Crusoe was set up as an example of dissenting virtue to the author's contemporaries, neither did I suspect that his adventures were based on the true and far more severe experiences of Alexander Selkirk. Such trifles never troubled me. My Crusoe was more real than all the explorers of the world put together. He had answered the call of the deep. He had dared to do what I had only dared to dream. He had committed what he himself called his "original sin," disobeying his parents, running away from home, and sailing wildly for everywhere and nowhere. Like Sinbad the Sailor and all boys worthy of their salt, he had discarded the comforts of a cramped existence burdened with sums and spelling-books, and had boldly taken a life-long holiday. I was especially struck by the fact that, after his first escape from Morocco and his successful career as a Brazilian planter, his insatiable desire for adventure had prompted him a second time to sail away on perilous seas, just to oblige his friends.

But there was another side to Crusoe's nature, which I admired just as much as his daring and which gave me a kind of satisfaction with which no other hero I met at this period provided me. Other adventurers might be as bold as he, but none could be as good and patient. I could look up to him without any scruple, for, besides daring to eat the forbidden fruit, he showed an unlimited capacity for digesting it. He could adapt himself to the worst circumstances and make the best use of the small means at his disposal. He possessed a colossal optimism which allowed him to look at the bright side of things when anyone else would have been plunged in darkness. I liked his way of reasoning with himself after being cast on to his desert island, and of repeating that, if matters were pretty bad for himself, they were even worse for his companions who had been swallowed up by the sea, and that if it was rather regrettable that the island was uninhabited, it was a comfort to be thus deprived of the attentions of cannibals. I duly appreciated his blind trust in a personal Providence, which seemed to watch over him and place in his hands the right tools and weapons for every crisis of his life.

In his *Desert Islands* Walter de la Mare suggests that there may have been a certain amount of

humbug in this religious fervour, which is further emphasised in the sequels to the original work. But I had not read the *Farther Adventures* and the *Serious Reflections* and I found a kind of moral satisfaction in being able to admire my hero wholeheartedly and with a clear conscience. My childlike priggishness was satisfied by being able to balance the original sin of running away from home with such sterling qualities as untiring and ingenious industry, gentleness towards the weak, and perfect self-control in times of stress. Every nail, every board, every seed collected from the wreck of the ship, was put to its proper use. Man Friday was not only saved from his tormentors, but received a proper education—just the kind I should have liked to give him if I had been in Crusoe's place. I too should have taught him to say "Master," "and then let him know that was to be my name." I too should have given him milk and a cake of bread, and should have chosen the same means of ridding him of his cannibalistic habits. I too should have appeared angry at the suggestion of disinterring the bodies of my enemies, and of making a meal of them, and should have "made as if I would vomit at the thoughts of it." I was delighted to see Crusoe dress up Friday just as if he had been a doll, and was tickled by the idea that the naked savage felt

uncomfortable in his new drawers and that "the waistcoat galled his shoulders and the insides of his arms," just as my own clothes galled me when I was growing out of them.

But what impressed me most was Crusoe's remarkable wisdom and coolness, the strength of spirit with which he declared that in spite of his exile and solitude he was "a happy prisoner" because he remained "master of his soul's liberty," and the effect which this attitude of mind had on all his actions. When faced with sudden and unexpected dangers, he did not rush wildly into the fray like other romantic heroes with whom I was acquainted; he did not challenge fate with the military dash of a burning d'Artagnan; on the contrary, he spied the enemy with his glasses from a convenient vantage-point, took every possible precaution, calculated every chance, and then, only then, put his plans into execution with perfect calmness and deliberation. The French story-books I had read before had instilled into me the idea that courage was necessarily associated with a certain amount of bravado, and that a true hero did not know even the meaning of fear. Being myself dreadfully afraid of the dark and the hundred bogies that haunted my night-dreams, I had felt obliged to give up all hope of following in the footsteps of these gallant men.

But Crusoe knew fear and was not ashamed of it. He was extremely cautious before the event and only showed his mettle when a conflict had become unavoidable and the hour for action had struck. He was not so much out of my reach, and I was therefore far more attracted to him. I discovered in him a kind of homeliness and kinship which aroused my sympathy as well as my admiration. He was human as well as humane. His success was not a foregone conclusion, and there were even moments when he gave me the privilege of pitying him.

Now, this Robinson Crusoe was an Englishman, He was connected with an island which, I had been told, lay somewhere north of the Belgian coast. I had not yet been to the seaside, but was assured that England was out of sight—therefore very far away, lost in that blue patch of ocean which I had seen on the map. I must have read my book very hastily at first, paying more attention to the pictures than to the text, since I laboured for some time under the delusion that England was indeed Crusoe's island, and that that was the reason why he was called an Englishman. It was only gradually and with some regret that I realised my mistake, but I found comfort in the idea that, if my hero was not the only Englishman, at least all Englishmen must be like my hero.

I lived at the time in a small house in the Avenue Louise in Brussels. The garden was a narrow strip of ground shut in by high walls, at the end of which grew a large chestnut tree which smothered all our flowers. With the help of a few sticks, some packing-cases and an old sheet, I had managed to build myself a hut around this tree, in which I gathered a collection of miscellaneous tools and disused weapons, and in which I was allowed to take my breakfast in the summer. One of my mother's old muffs made an ideal cap, and a mangy hearthrug fastened with a few straps formed an even more stifling coat. There was my cat Ninou and my dog Beauty. But I lacked a parrot. It did not matter in the least that, when I sat in front of my observatory applying a roll of cardboard to my eye, my horizon was strictly limited by the ivy-covered walls. A little imagination altered the perspective, and after all the sea could be painted green. What mattered much more was that my canary could not be painted red and was far too small to play the part of Polly. Nothing happened on the wall, but then nothing had happened for over twenty years round Crusoe's island. There was plenty of time to spare. One of my mother's friends, who had come to stay with her, provided me at last with a much-needed Man Friday, in the shape of a little girl whom I lured

into my tent and endeavoured to undress for the part. This last episode drew down such retribution on my head that the subject is still painful to me; since that time I have had no difficulty in understanding why Friday is considered to be an unlucky day.

This jealous worship for my English hero made me look askance on all his imitators, and I still nurse a grudge against certain German *Robinsonaden* and the *Swiss Family Robinson*, which were pressed upon me by my kind mother, in the hope that I should get the same pleasure from these books and also perhaps that their romantic artificiality would somewhat temper my realistic zeal. I am much interested to learn that some writers of the present generation, such as E. M. Forster, have been able to preserve a genuine enthusiasm for such "demi-gods" as Fritz, Ernest, Jack and little Franz, "together with their father, their mother, and a cushion, which contained all the appliances necessary for a ten-years residence in the tropics."[1] I wonder whether Mr. Forster had met the true Robinson before meeting these sham parodists. If he had done so, could he ever have believed in them enough to reverence them in after-years? But this is perhaps an indiscreet question, for an Englishman is bound,

[1] *Aspects of the Novel.*

from early boyhood, to show extreme indulgence towards any story of the kind. Crusoe is so much in his blood that even a second or third brew of the mixture must fill him with wonder. As far as I was concerned, the German and Swiss *Robinsonaden* only confirmed me in my belief that none but an Englishman was fit to live Robinson's life.

It was about that time that I first began to read Jules Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires*. Not wishing to hear about latitudes and longitudes, submarine flora and the distance between the earth and the moon, I sucked the marrow from these wonderful gilt-edged volumes and rejected their dry bones. It was still a thrilling experience in those days to cross Africa in a dirigible balloon and to explore the bottom of the sea. It may still, for a few years longer, be a thrilling experience to be shot from the earth to the moon, installed in a comfortable cabin built inside a shell. I remember being struck by the number of Englishmen who, with their French colleagues, took part in these wonderful adventures. One of them made such a lasting impression on my mind that he vied for a while with my pet hero, and, incidentally, made me acquainted with a new and very different type of Englishman. I still see him as I saw him in a stage version of *Round the World in Eighty Days*—spotlessly clean, without a crease in

his clothes, his pale face framed between " Piccadilly weepers," his wavy hair parted in the middle—striding across the globe with giant steps, pursued by a wily detective, rescuing an Indian princess from a funeral pyre, being blown into the air in mid-ocean, fighting, with his faithful Passe-Partout, a crowd of Red Indians who attacked his train, and finally arriving in his London Club, more immaculate than ever, to win his wager in the nick of time.

It took me many years to understand that Crusoe, with his goatskins and guns, could walk hand-in-hand with Phileas Fogg, with his checked suit and field-glasses ; that they were really two aspects of the same person : the settler and the traveller. The latter should have been mentioned first, for the settler or colonist is only a traveller who, by force of circumstances, breaks his journey for a time. It may be for a short time, in which case the traveller is an explorer ; or for a longer time, when he becomes a trader ; or for an indefinite time, which makes him the founder of a colony or dominion.

The travelling instinct and the spirit of adventure, so deeply ingrained in the English temperament, are indeed the spiritual foundations of the British Empire. Though, from a literary point of view, Phileas Fogg is a rather flimsy creation, he taught me a very valuable lesson. Undeterred by material

difficulties, the English are natural globe-trotters. Though fond of home, they are seized from time to time with wanderlust or what the French call "la bougeotte." All means of breaking loose seem good to them, whether walking, sailing, coaching, cycling, motoring, or flying. They clutch at every new invention which facilitates or accelerates their movements, and, when they can no longer travel far afield, they still obstinately keep up their constitutional of three or four miles a day when their foreign contemporaries have long ago resigned themselves to the paralysis of old age. When once the Englishman has started, he pursues his voyage with a peculiar determination. There is a certain exaggeration in the following description given by O'Rel in *John Bull and His Island*, but it is not entirely unjustified: "Obstinate as a mule, stubborn as a bull-dog, the difficulties in his path will but act as incentives to him. He has traced himself a programme; nothing will prevent his carrying it out. He leaves England with his diary written beforehand. He has settled to be at the top of a certain mountain at a certain time; he is bound to be there; and I promise you that, if he has not rolled down some precipice, there you will find him."

A great deal of justifiable criticism has been launched against record-breakers, for the finest quality

may degenerate into a sterile mania. It matters very little whether Phileas Fogg is able to put a girdle round the earth in eighty days, since he is always being beaten by Puck who can do it in forty minutes. But it may be rather important for a nation in need of expansion to be the first to reach a new land, and to plant its flag on virgin soil. Exploration is the first step towards colonisation, and the element of rivalry often acts as a stimulus.

As soon as I was able to distinguish between fiction and history, I had no difficulty in understanding how the country which gave birth to Crusoe and Phileas Fogg was bound to produce such men as Drake, Captain Cook, Sir John Franklin and Livingstone, and could compete successfully against all rivals on sea and land, in the Tropics or round the Poles. The record of their true adventures only confirmed the impression that romance had already made upon me, and added to my first vision a quaint procession of figures wearing brilliant uniforms, arctic furs and cork helmets.

Later still, I was struck by the number and quality of English novels based on the Crusoe theme. In France, the "roman d'aventure" is mainly historical. We must come to England for a continuous tradition of writers who set their stories in exotic climes. Nowhere else has the geographical

novel reached such popularity and such a high literary standard. Robert Louis Stevenson will go down to posterity as the greatest traveller-writer of modern times. He was certainly not prompted by sheer physical exuberance or the desire to kill time. His passion urged him on, in spite of his frail health and money difficulties. It was with him a true vocation, whether he wandered with a donkey through the Cévennes or went steerage to America. A true islander, he could not resist the attraction of islands: Honolulu, Tahiti, Samoa, and the magic island which rises today from the blue sea before the eyes of every English boy, as it rose in the year of grace 17— before the eyes of Jim Hawkins and his companions. *Treasure Island* holds the same position in the nineteenth century as that held by Robinson Crusoe in the eighteenth. It clothes the classic theme in new romantic garments, substituting the glamour of landscape and the excitement of mystery for instructive and edifying reflections. Island, treasure, and pirates have become closely linked together in a hundred stories, partly imaginative, partly derived from historical records. The highest expression of this kind of literature, based on the love of the sea and dealing with the conflicts of pioneers with outlaws and savages, may be found in some of Conrad's novels

and in Masefield's *Captain Margaret*. The popularity of such books is assured, because they arouse an instinct that is deeply rooted in the race. The Crusoe novel is in fact a "safe book" in English literature, in the same sense that Macduff is a "safe part" on the English stage. The author is so sure of obtaining an immediate response that he can afford to linger over poetic descriptions and psychological developments which might have proved fatal to his success had the theme been a different one.

It is impossible to say what new form the Crusoe novel will take in the future, when the romantic and treasure-hunting theme becomes exhausted. There may be a return to the didactic or symbolic type of story of Renaissance days, such as Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* or Shakespeare's *Tempest*. The island may again be used for the purpose of comparing our way of living with that of some imaginary people wiser or more foolish than ourselves. There is no reason why twentieth-century authors should not follow Swift's example and dress *Gulliver's Travels* in the latest fashions, as Rose Macaulay has done, for instance, in her humorous *Orphan Island*.

Whatever happens, the Crusoe legend will never die, for it is a natural expression of the genius of the race. It seems as if the English could not conceive

a treasure, whether material or spiritual, without enshrining it in the sea. If they were pagans, they would place their Paradise or their happy " sporting-ground " in some wonderful island, under unclouded skies. It would appear to them, after their last crossing, emerging from a belt of mist in the form of " two low hills, about a couple of miles apart, and rising behind one of them a third and higher hill whose peak " would be still " buried in the fog." As it is, their education may be compared to a sea voyage, the crisis of their youth to the storm wrecking their ship, and the rest of their life to the search for gold and power, or for God and man's happiness, according to the star under which they were born.

A great deal has been written lately about the Boy Scout movement and the amazing success it has achieved in so short a time. Such results might have been expected by anyone familiar with the Crusoe spirit. A camp during the holidays, the joys of roughing it, of eating one's own cooking, of fiddling and contriving, is enough to stir any youngster; but the English boy must feel besides the influence of past generations urging him forward and prompting him to " be prepared " for the great adventure, the voyage to his own island and the discovery of his own treasure, whatever it may be.

There is a moral element which adds to the proud satisfaction of every Scout worthy of carrying his stick. He is not a mere adventurer, but believes himself to be the champion of a good cause, the friend of the weak, the enemy of evil-doers. He is fighting pirates all the time.

In his essay on Rudyard Kipling,[1] André Chevrillon explains that, according to the author of *The Five Nations*, the British Empire was really built up by "the descendant of the Angle, the Saxon, the Northman—yeoman, farmer, squire, merchant, sailor—who is a slow man, patient, practical, tenacious, impervious to boredom, religious and law-abiding; the man who was praised by Carlyle for his hold on matter, his power for silence and his spontaneous discipline; the man whom Defoe showed us, drawing from within himself his courage, resistance and activity, challenging solitude with work, reading the Bible and colonising, building his home with his own hands and constantly improving it, and ending by becoming the master of all things in his island, because he bound himself by a law, because he was not only his own master but master of himself."

This relationship between Defoe's hero and British imperialism, as expressed by Kipling twenty

[1] *Trois Etudes de Littérature Anglaise.*

years ago, is not so paradoxical as it may appear at first sight. Crusoe tells us of how he succeeded in ruling over his small community after Friday's father and the Spaniard had been rescued from the cannibals: "My people were perfectly subjected. I was absolute lord and law-giver; they all owed their lives to me, and were ready to lay down their lives, if there had been occasion of it, for me. It was remarkable too, we had but three subjects, and they were of three different religions. My Man Friday was a Protestant, his father was a pagan and a cannibal, and the Spaniard was a Papist. However, I allowed liberty of conscience throughout my dominions."

This idea of the mastery of a chosen people owing their power not to material but to moral superiority and perfect obedience to the law they impose on others occurs again and again in Kipling's poetry. No modern writer has caught with the same intensity the prophetic spirit of the Old Testament. "Hold ye the faith," says the *Song of the English*:

Hold ye the Faith—the Faith our fathers sealéd us—
Whoring not with visions overwise and overstale.
Except ye pay the Lord
Single heart and single sword,
Of your children in their bondage He shall ask them treble tale.

Keep ye the Law—be swift in all obedience—
Clear the land of evil, drive the road and bridge the ford.
Make ye sure to each his own,
That he reap where he has sown;
By the peace among Our peoples, let Men know we serve the Lord.

So far, in its highest expression, the "Pax Britannica." Every possession becomes a sacred trust. We must not forget that, besides his guns, Crusoe carried "in a kind of a frog, instead of a sword and a dagger, a little saw and a hatchet, one on one side, one on the other." He has not come to destroy or exploit, but to serve and build. The natives owe him allegiance, but he is responsible to God for their welfare. Kipling's *Explorer* becomes a martyr who sacrifices himself for the sake of the community. The pioneer will not reap the reward of his efforts. This is the *White Man's Burden*:

Take up the White Man's burden—
No tawdry rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper—
The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter,
The roads ye shall not tread,
Go make them with your living,
And mark them with your dead.

After the fight has been fought and the bridge built, a lasting peace must be sealed with the old

foe. The new law of tolerance and co-operation is proclaimed. Let bygones be bygones and let everyone follow his own creed and conscience as long as the welfare of the community does not suffer through it. After the Soldier comes the *Settler*, and the sword is beaten into a ploughshare :

> Here, in a large and a sunlit land,
> Where no wrong bites to the bone,
> I will lay my hand in my neighbour's hand,
> And together we will atone
> For the set folly and the red breach
> And the black waste of it all,
> Giving and taking counsel each
> Over the cattle-kraal.

Other countries have had great war poets, exalting the military virtues of discipline and sacrifice. But the voice which urged the people to the struggle is seldom raised to sing the blessings of peace and reconciliation when the conflict is over. This English incapacity for hatred is so universally recognised that it scarcely needs emphasising. The fact that it manifests itself in the works of a poet who is often looked upon as a narrow nationalist who fanned warlike passions into flame is, however, worthy of mention.

It is not for me to discuss here whether, in the slow building-up of their Empire, the English have

never strayed from such high-minded ideals, or whether the legitimate pride which made of them the chosen race, has never led to injustice. I only wish to point out how well the almost unconscious development of this "Commonwealth of Free Nations" fits the Crusoe philosophy and the English attitude of mind. When people attend the yearly open-air service held in Hyde Park on the 24th of May, they do not always realise what an amazing achievement the Empire implies and how essentially modern its conception is. It is possible to compare the "Pax Britannica" with the "Pax Romana," yet the British Empire stands in complete contrast to the Roman "Imperium." The latter rests on a pre-conceived plan which is gradually put into execution until the dream of national hegemony over the world becomes a reality. The same may be said of the empires of Charlemagne, Charles V, Louis XIV and Napoleon. Rome, Aix-la-Chapelle, Madrid, Paris and Berlin have been in turn the centres of an expanding force which spread abroad, or which would have done so if some accident had not put an end to its action or checked its progress. While defending herself successfully against these attempts to create in Europe a centralised State which would have brought her into subjection, England has managed in the course of the last four

centuries, with no great military effort, to lay hold of almost all the maritime key-positions and of immense tracts of virgin soil. All her crucial battles have had a defensive character and have been waged in Europe or European waters, the results achieved in Asia, America, Australia and Africa being out of all proportion to the fighting which led up to them. The English did not conquer their Empire. To use M. Chevrillon's happy metaphor, they merely "swarmed" in various directions, and, whenever climatic circumstances allowed it, each swarm settled down in its own hive, becoming in its turn a fresh centre of radiating energy.

To maintain by sheer force the unity of such an Empire would be a confession of failure. It must rest, where English settlements are concerned, on the willingness of each independent Dominion to look towards the mother-country for guidance and help. In this case, the bond is purely theoretical and consists far more in community of language, interests and aspirations than in any formal obligation on either side. In the case of possessions where a native majority live under the rule of a small English minority, Empire unity depends ultimately on the acceptance by the people of a law which, by organising the country and neutralising rival interests, has proved too beneficial to be rejected.

Crusoe was the kind of master who, if placed at the head of a community, would have appealed to his people for advice as soon as he had succeeded in educating them sufficiently. Every colonist is faced with the alternative of governing barbarians with an iron hand or of exerting his influence over a semi-civilised people by means of the prestige conferred upon him by superior skill and wisdom. Most nations seem to agree today that the second method is both morally and practically the sounder of the two. Without in the least disparaging the results obtained elsewhere, it is possible to say that England has given the lead in that direction, and has used Crusoe's saw and hatchet far more freely than his guns.

It needs a wiser man than I to say whether self-interest or Christian morality has inspired this policy, whether the English have deemed it more efficient to be righteous or more righteous to be efficient, in their relations with the peoples who have come under their rule. But the fact that Interest and Duty are in the habit of walking hand in-hand through the avenues of English history does not justify the cynical assumption that the first is always leading the second. We are highly entertained to hear the *Man of Destiny* declare, in true Shavian style that " when the Englishman wants a thing he

never tells himself that he wants it, he waits patiently until there comes into his mind, no one knows how, a burning conviction that it is his moral and religious duty to conquer those who have got the thing he wants "—because we are ready to agree that such must have been Napoleon's opinion of the English in 1796. As an independent statement, made over a century later, it sounds, however, unfair and out of place. What Shaw's Napoleon forgot is that the Englishman who wanted those new possessions was not the same as the one who exerted and sacrificed himself to conquer them. The first was the ruler or the politician, the second was the man in the street, and the fact that the government had to wait before launching an expedition until it had succeeded in convincing the people that their duty compelled them to take action, was of good omen for the future. It is one thing for Napoleon to declare that the Englishman is ready to do anything as long as he does it " on principle " and for a modern writer to suggest that the sense of justice of English public opinion is invariably warped by land- and money-grabbing ambitions. If Albion had indeed been " hypocritical " or " perfidious," she would have tightened her grip on her Dominions instead of releasing them one by one from any but the flimsiest obligation towards herself. She would

have thoroughly exploited her colonies, instead of irrigating their deserts, damming up their streams, stimulating their industries and covering their territories with a network of roads and railways. She would, above all, have kept the natives in a happy state of ignorance and subjection, instead of welcoming them to her schools and universities and prompting them—perhaps too eagerly—to take an active part in the administration of their country. She would never have exposed herself to such criticism as that voiced by Kipling, in his poem *Kitchener's School*. It will be remembered that this poem is supposed to be "a translation of a song that was made by a Mohammedan schoolmaster . . . when he heard that Kitchener," after his victory at Omdurman, "was taking money from the English to build a college for the Sudanese":

Knowing that ye are forfeit by battle and have no right to live,
He begs for money to bring you learning—and all the English give.
It is their treasure—it is their pleasure—thus are their hearts inclined:
For Allah created the English mad—the maddest of all mankind!

. . . . . .

Certainly they were mad from of old: but I think one new thing:
That the magic whereby they work their magic—wherefrom their fortunes spring—

May be that they show all peoples their magic and ask no price in return.
Wherefore, since ye are bound to that magic, O Hubshee, make haste and learn!

In the light of recent events, it is no longer possible to declare that it always pays to practise one's principles. England now finds herself faced in India, Egypt, and South Africa, with a series of problems which would not have arisen so soon had she not been as good as her word. The attitude of mind of modern England vindicates Crusoe's moralising; it shows that, whatever mistakes were made in the past, she is resolved to follow, with Crusoe-like obstinacy, the difficult course that she has deliberately chosen. She realises that every centralised Empire held together by force was ruined when the weakening of that force allowed the composite parts to break away. She still believes that she can only find security in the future by developing on federal lines the Commonwealth of Free Nations which she has grouped together and which have hitherto turned to her for guidance and help. No sensible objection based on past experience will divert her from this course. It would be as vain to point out that it is a course which is fraught with dangers and has never been followed before, as it would have been to try to prevent

Crusoe from embarking on his adventures. In such discussions, the English will always have the last word: "The experiment may be mad, but it is the only one worth attempting"—which may also mean that it is the only one they deem worthy of them.

CHAPTER II

MODERN GREECE

A FEW years after meeting Robinson Crusoe, when I had begun to go to school, I was toiling at my geography homework by the light of an oil lamp. I was anxiously trying to finish in time a map of my hero's mother-country, and growing more and more confused by its medley of gulfs, capes and estuaries. Suddenly a happy thought flashed through my mind. Did not Great Britain look like a draped figure? Did not her outline suggest some Greek goddess kneeling in the sea, with her head in the highlands, her breastplate in the Lowlands, her knee in Norfolk, and her foot in Kent, while her draperies, blown by the east wind, fluttered as far as the Hebrides and trailed among the headlands of Wales and Cornwall? This vague analogy proved a considerable help in my work, and I went to bed that night, my task finished, thrilled with the pleasure of a new discovery.

I had seen, in one of my history-books, a picture of the Victory of Samothrace, and had been told

that the Greeks sculpted such figures on the prows of their ships. It seemed to be curiously appropriate that this proud island should sail through the map with the same bold attitude, and that the sea should break on her shores as it had broken, centuries ago, around the noble shapes of the Grecian "Victories."

As I became more familiar with my Classics, many similar images convinced me that England was indeed the spiritual heiress of Greece, and played, in modern days, on the Atlantic coast, the part which had been played by her ancestor in the eastern Mediterranean, twenty-five centuries ago. Was not Britannia, with her shield and helmet, remarkably like the tutelar goddess of Athens? The fact that she wielded Neptune's trident instead of Pallas's lance did not disturb me in the least, for I realised that the Trojan War had been waged in the heavens as well as round Ilion's walls. Why should not victorious Athena have snatched Poseidon's weapon from his hands? Like the "grey-eyed" goddess, Albion was supposed to be wise and sober. White cliffs protected her virginity against the looseness of continental morals and the excesses of unbridled instincts.

The few pictorial documents at my disposal had given me a most favourable opinion of the

physical beauty of the English. They were surely the only athletes fit to compete with the old Olympic champions. Imagine the impression produced on a peaky boy of fourteen, who was only allowed one hour's gym a week, and who had never had the opportunity of seeing games played in the open, by the vision of eight young giants, bare-armed and bare-kneed, swinging along with their boat on their shoulders as if they did not feel its weight. My imagination had been stirred by the Homeric description of Nausicaa's companions playing ball near the shore where Odysseus had been shipwrecked. " E'en so the maid unwedded her maidens all outwent." I had no idea that any modern girl could run as fast and move as gracefully as these, until I saw a picture of a hockey-match played by an English team on the Sussex downs. The players stood out against the sea background, their hair flying round their faces, unhampered in their movements, wearing incredibly short skirts above their leggings. The latter specially filled me with admiration. Homer had taught me to worship his heroes' " greaves," but surely they were things of the past, too wonderful to be worn today, even by boys. Yet here was a country where they were worn by girls, where the beauty of old days was revived not only through art and history but through the very

life of the people. I didn't care whether these English people read, or wrote, or painted fine things, so long as they managed to be fine themselves. The classic statues of the Gladiator and the Discobolus, shining in the shade of some public park, had given me a glimpse of the past glories of athleticism and of the free play of muscles in the human body, but, with a child's thirst for realism, I was far more excited by an imperfect image of the present than by the most faultless representation of the past.

It is somewhat difficult to give a faithful account of early impressions gathered here and there over forty years ago, but that old copy of the *Graphic*, picked up from the table of a dentist's waiting-room, did nearly as much to stir my interest in England as *Robinson Crusoe* had done before. I remember the cool room—the sun was burning the pavement outside—the groans of the patient next door—dentists did not run to the luxury of anæsthetics in those days—and the gilt clock on the mantelpiece adorned with the figure of Jason in Greek armour, laying his hand on the Golden Fleece. This gawdy ornament provided me at the time with a most useful connecting-link. Was not Jason an adventurer like Crusoe? Had he not embarked with his companions on a mad treasure-hunt to distant Colchis? Had

not the Argo also suffered from the wild moods of sea and weather?

Another connection between Greece and England was given me by Byron. I was not yet able to read him in the original, but I had glanced through a volume on the frontispiece of which the poet appeared with curly head proudly erect, his white neck revealed by his open shirt, a cloak loosely flung over his shoulder.

A friend of my grandmother, on whom I called from time to time, had shown me, with tremulous hands and quivering lips, a gold medallion which she preserved among her most sacred treasures. It contained a lock of black hair which, she whispered shyly, had been given her by Lord Byron during his stay in Brussels. I suppose that she must have shared this privilege with many others, but the idea never occurred to me at the time. I was far too much impressed by the awed reverence with which the old dame spoke of this as the greatest adventure in her life. I envied the poet's power of calling up blushes to those shrivelled cheeks, after so many years. He had passed through her life and through the world like a bright comet, and his light was not forgotten. What a glorious existence must have been his—a hero adored of all women, and devoting his life to Freedom, to the Freedom and

Independence of Greece! Lamartine and Hugo praised him, and Shelley was his friend. The modern Achilles had burned the body of the modern Patrocles on the shores of the Tyrrhenean Sea. He had sailed through the Mediterranean, scaled the snow-capped Alps, wandered through the orange-groves of Italy, his hand resting on the shoulder of his fair mistress, and died a hero's death at Missolonghi. After all these years, the name has not yet lost its magic sonority.

This England, whose shores I had vainly strained my eyes to see when spending a holiday on the Belgian coast, became for me a land of beautiful men and women, who spent their days running or riding through her green fields, and their evenings listening to the eloquent verses of her poets.[1] For Byron did not stand alone. If he had given a great funeral to Shelley, Shelley himself had lamented the death of Keats, with a voice as pure and heart-breaking as the nightingale's. And at the back of it all stood Shakespeare, who, despite the disfigurements of a vile translation, was beginning to dawn on my horizon like the sun in May.

It took me some time to realise, through the

[1] This association of athleticism and poetry is worth emphasising. Robert Lynd writes: "It may not be an accident that the two nations which have produced the greatest poets, are the nations which have paid the greatest honour to athletes." *Cf.* chap. VIII, p. 156.

scanty information which I obtained from time to time, that my much-admired athletes were only a minority of the youth of England, and that love of poetry was not the only passion which moved English hearts. I was gradually obliged to recognise that Trafalgar Square was not the Acropolis, and that the outlines of the National Gallery were not as impressive as those of the Parthenon. Still, something of the old illusion has remained, and the more I live in this country the more I feel that the cloak of Athens has fallen upon her shoulders. I have serious doubts about the Lost Tribes of Israel. The theory of an early Greek exploration beyond the Pillars of Hercules and of the establishment of a colony on Britain's soil seems far more attractive. Why should not another Jason have sailed towards the setting sun, for the special purpose of teaching Ancient Britons the use of the ball?

Was it not Herodotus who wrote something to the effect that the Greeks gathered round the sea like frogs round a pool? There is no nation in the world so irresistibly attracted by water as the English. To sit in Kensington Gardens and watch the children sailing their boats on the Round Pond is a lesson in itself. There you will find smart little boys from Kensington and Chelsea proudly carrying their expensive model yachts, and you will

find the urchin of Shepherd's Bush dragging at the end of a string a rough piece of wood with a fluttering rag, which does duty for a ship. You will also find, on certain days, scores of grown men, members of a Model Yacht Club, sending their craft across the Pond with the solemnity and suppressed excitement of bowlers on the green. Herodotus' image may, without any exaggeration, be applied during the holidays to every navigable river, to the Norfolk Broads and to any popular seaside place, the shores of which are so thickly crowded that the sand or the pebbles are scarcely discernible. The passion for bathing, boating and yachting is so deeply ingrained that the British may indeed pass for the distant descendants of Tritons and Sirens exiled on terra firma and looking back yearningly to their former amphibious life.

A parallel may be drawn between Greek and English descriptions of the calm or angry sea. Speaking of the breakers, Euripides, in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, uses the image of the Sea-Daughters' dance :

> When folks on the waves astray
> Have seen, through the gleaming grey,
> Ring behind ring, men say,
> The dance of the old Sea Daughters.[1]

[1] Transl. Gilbert Murray. Prof. Gilbert Murray's fine translations are in themselves an example of the kinship existing between the two literatures. Only an Englishman could take such liberties with the text while preserving the spirit of the original.

Twenty-four centuries later, the same image occurs in Masefield's *Cardigan Bay* :

> Dancing, flashing green seas shaking white locks,
> Boiling in blind eddies over hidden rocks,
> And the wind in the rigging, the creaking of the blocks,
> And the straining of the timber hulls.

This idea of the dance of the waves, which Stevenson has developed in *The Merry Men*, belongs no doubt to all maritime peoples, and might also be found in some of the old sagas. But the fascination of the sea is nowhere so completely expressed as in Greece and England. Compare, for instance, the description of Poseidon, in *The Trojan Women*, springing from the " Ægean caverns " haunted by the Nereids, through " pools of blue salt sea," with that of " mighty Neptune " shaking " his dread trident " in the first act of *The Tempest*, and with Wordsworth's vision of " Proteus rising from the sea " while old Triton blows " his wreathed horn."

Patriotic fervour is not the monopoly of the Greeks and English, but the limits set by the sea have brought their lands within a closer and more definite range of vision. The " nodding promontories and blue isles of Greece " basking " in the open smiles of favouring Heaven "[1] were as real to the Greek poets as " this royal throne of kings, this

[1] Shelley : *Ode to Liberty*.

sceptred isle" was to Shakespeare and is still to every English heart.

If the sea stimulates the joy of home life, it also embitters the sorrow of exile. The plaintive cry of the chorus of captives in *Iphigenia*:

> Oh, for a kind Greek market-place again,
> Give me the little hill above the sea!

is echoed by Coleridge in the *Ancient Mariner*:

> Is this the hill? Is this the kirk?
> Is this mine own countree?

by Browning in *Home Thoughts from Abroad*, and by many another English poet.

The sea is not only associated with the spirit of adventure which inspired Crusoe's ancestors and followers. It is also intimately bound up with the love of freedom. The Persian Wars left on Greek life the same indelible impression that the Spanish Armada and the Napoleonic wars left on England. There may have been something artificial in the wild enthusiasm provoked in western countries by the Greek struggle for independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is the fashion to smile today at Byron's utterances when visiting Marathon Plain, and at the contrast which, as Childe Harold, he constantly draws between the glory of Ancient Greece and what has become for him a "sad relic

of departed worth." But the lead given at the time by the English Romanticists is nevertheless symptomatic. They were not only bound to Greece, as were the French writers of the period, by the glamour of classic memories; they were drawn to her by a sincere feeling of kinship. Athens was for Shelley the very symbol of national and social liberty:

> a city such as vision
> Builds from the purple crags and silver towers
> Of battlemented cloud, as in derision
> Of kingliest masonry.

Fifty years later, in his *Ode to Athens*, Swinburne sums up the English romantic view of Greece, and goes so far as to identify the two countries as the champions of freedom in the world:

> Fair as Athens then with foot upon her foeman's front, and strong
> Even as Athens for redemption of the world from sovereign wrong,
> Like as Athens crowned she stood before the sun with crowning song.
> All the world is theirs with whom is freedom: first of all the free,
> Blest are they whom song has crowned and clothed with blessing: these as we,
> These alone have part in spirit with the sun that crowns the sea.

This kind of Pro-Hellenism has not been confined to literature. It has materially affected

Great Britain's foreign policy in the nineteenth century, and even since the war. Again and again England has swerved from the line of self-interest in order to give satisfaction to popular sympathy in this respect. The Greek influence is also keenly felt in education and on the stage. Certain schools, such as Bradfield, have preserved the tradition of producing the tragedies in the original. These performances are given in the open; the audience sits on the green banks of an amphitheatre, and the white figures of the actors stand out against a dark background of trees. Weather permitting, the rolling harmony of Sophocles' and Euripides' verse may be heard through the rustling of old English oaks. But weather seldom permits. The words are frequently snatched from the mouths of the performers by gusts of wind, and the audience must run for shelter. There is something at once admirable and pathetic in the efforts made to keep up, under England's uncertain skies, the old tradition founded in the serener climate of the Mediterranean. I have been told of the performance of a Greek tragedy given by Oxford undergraduates in the Roman Baths, in Bath. The intention of the players had been to set their stage in the open space in the centre, while the public stood under the colonnade. Owing to the inclemency of the weather, however,

they were obliged to alter their plans and act under shelter, the audience thus witnessing the play through a curtain of rain.

Comparisons between the Greek and English maritime civilisations may be carried further. It may be suggested, for instance, that the famous prophecy of the Delphic Oracle, advising the Greeks at the time of the Persian wars to shelter behind ramparts of wood—that is to say, in their ships—applies equally well to both countries, and that the victory of Salamis finds its counterpart in the victories of the British navy, from the Armada to the Battle of Jutland. It may also be said that England has, to a great extent, adopted the Greek principle of federalism, as opposed to the Roman method of centralisation, in the building-up of her Empire. She was the first country to establish democratic institutions in the modern world, as Athens was the first to promote equality of citizenship and a method of free election in the old.

The subsequent practice of public discussion encouraged oratory in both countries. This does not mean that every English speaker is a Demosthenes, but that the average Englishmen appreciates the power of eloquence and never misses an opportunity of practising the art. He is not willing, like most citizens of continental nations, to listen to a trained

orator, lecturer or politician, who will express his ideas with all the skill of a barrister and all the charm of an artist. He wishes to bring his own contribution to the argument, however modest and halting it may be. Even at school he is launched into debates at an age when no continental boy or girl would dream of expressing their views in public. This healthy habit is kept up at the University unions. The foreigner is surprised to find that every industrial or agricultural village prides itself on possessing a literary or debating society, where discussions of the most abstruse or topical problems are carried on in a friendly but somewhat tense atmosphere. No public meeting is successful in England unless the Chairman has played his part of introducing the speaker and thanking him, while two or three people in the audience volunteer to propose and second the formal vote of thanks. After questions have been asked or some heckling has taken place, practically every vocal member of the gathering has had an opportunity to air his or her views. At public banquets, this kind of procedure is pushed further still, for, after the Chairman has had his say, a number of speakers have to propose a number of healths, and those whose names have been coupled with the toasts must suitably acknowledge the courtesy. The feast would be marred if

another speech, in honour of the guests, were not added to the list, and here again proper thanks must be given. Such oratorial feats are frequently carried on far into the night, and the foreigner goes away with the impression that the English attach more importance to the art of speaking than to the quality of their food or wine.

The Greeks were often reproached by their wisest statesmen for talking when it was time to act. And indeed they did so when threatened with the Macedonian peril, and, later, when the Turks were knocking at the gates of Byzance. This reproach could not be fairly addressed to the English. When a serious crisis threatens them, they resume their power for silence so much admired by Carlyle, and turn their activity in other directions. Indeed, they are not a particularly talkative race. It needs the stimulus of a public gathering to rouse the eloquence even of their best speakers, who show far more talent on the platform than in private conversation.

All these Anglo-Greek characteristics are linked together. Love of the sea fosters patriotism and liberty outside and inside the land, and social liberty finds its expression in the Agora, in public meetings and in Parliament. When asked why he preferred to remain in England

rather than to seek a milder climate, Tennyson replies :

> It is the land that freemen till,
> That sober-suited Freedom chose,
> The land where, girt with friends or foes,
> A man may speak the thing he will.[1]

All English poets, even the least orthodox such as Shelley and Swinburne, seem to agree on this point. England's freedom was taken for granted at times when its value was purely relative to the conditions prevailing in other countries. "Though o'er our heads the frozen Pleiads shine," exclaims Addison :

> 'Tis Liberty that crowns Britannia's isle,
> And makes her barren rocks and her bleak mountains smile.

There are, however, certain striking differences between the two civilisations which must not pass unnoticed. If Great Britain experiences some difficulty in maintaining and consolidating the ties which hold her Empire together, while, at the same time, developing a system of self-government on federal lines, she does not suffer from internal dissensions. In spite of the freedom granted to local government, she impresses the outsider as one of the most united countries in Europe. There

[1] *On a Mourner.*

is perhaps no other example of two nations separated by differences of race, language and tradition, which after centuries of bitter fighting, have been welded together as solidly and harmoniously as England and Scotland.

A remark made by M. Clemenceau in 1921, when he was paying a short visit to Oxford, is worthy of record: "There are two things that every Frenchman, at the bottom of his heart, admires about England: First, you raised an army of some two million men by the voluntary system; no other nation in the world has ever done that or could do it. Secondly, you bear the most crushing income-tax in the world and make honest returns for it. . . . No other nation would bear it or would declare it." A foreigner who wishes to know this country could not make a more fatal mistake than to gather his information from those Englishmen who seem to find a special delight in criticising their country or in painting its future in the most gloomy colours. This attitude is either sincere or artificial. In the first case, it springs from an extreme patriotism which never can and never will be satisfied with realities. In the second, it collapses at the first shock—such as, for instance, the assent of the other party. Let the foreigner who reads this book beware of such snares, and avoid serving up

unpalatable meat to sensitive people who are merely fishing for compliments.

Far from being a symptom of division, this anti-English attitude is a proof of strength and, in some instances, of pride. The belief in national superiority is so deeply rooted that the English feel that they can afford to praise other countries even to the disparagement of their own. Besides, they are generally careful to criticise unessential things, or things which it is in their power to alter. They are quite prepared to admit the superiority of other countries as regards cooking (especially if they are not fond of food), or as regards music (particularly if they are not musical), and they will not fail to criticise the Government if they belong to the Opposition.

The Greek system of federalism came to grief not so much because the colonies did not remain loyal to the mother-country, as because the mother-country was deeply divided against herself, and thus became an easy prey to Macedonian militarism. In spite of racial differences, Britain is, on the contrary, so closely knit that she reacts at once to any threat from outside. She may lack the preparedness that is born of foresight, and may seem to carry on her work in an easy-going and casual way, but when any danger arises the whole social body contracts and

becomes as resistant as one of those punch-balls on which the most powerful boxers can make no impression.

There is another difference between Ancient Greece and Modern England which is sometimes forgotten. I have, on several occasions, heard English apologists of Greece indulge in disparaging comparisons between the intellectual and social developments of the two countries, without taking into account the vital fact that the glory of Athens was entirely dependent on slave-labour, and that the so-called Greek democracy was after all an aristocracy of free citizens. In the first chapter of *The New Jerusalem*, G. K. Chesterton sums up in a single sentence the historical aspect of the modern labour problem. "It is," he tells us, "the attempt to have the democracy of Paris without the slavery of Rome." We may say, in the same way, that it is the attempt to have the citizenship of Britain without the slavery of Athens. Chesterton is doubtless right when he attributes to Christian ideals the doctrine of liberty, equality and fraternity proclaimed by the French revolution. But the influence of such ideals seems also evident in the gradual development of English institutions. If we do not adopt the principle of individual freedom as the very foundation of social organisation, we may of course regret

the time when the whole population of the Greek cities flocked to the amphitheatres to witness the most powerful drama ever written, and when god-like statues looked down upon the games of god-like men. But if we recognise that no civilisation deserves to survive unless all its members, including the manual-workers, enjoy not only a nominal but a real freedom, then we must sympathise with the tawdry and vulgar side of modern life and realise that its value should not be measured according to intellectual or æsthetic standards, but according to the material and spiritual happiness it brings into this world. True, Trafalgar Square is not the Acropolis, but no rich man dares lift his stick against the poor man whom he meets there; and the National Gallery is not the Parthenon, but its walls contain the finest pictures collected by English art lovers during centuries, many of which have been freely given to the nation, for all the nation to see.

CHAPTER III

FOG

When I arrived in London with my friend Charles, in March, 1907, my first impression must have been very much akin to that of the Easterner who, emerging from Charing Cross Station, exclaimed: "What have these people done to their God that he should punish them in this way?"

An opaque and choking fog was obliterating every feature of the town. We drove at a crawling pace through this yellow and acrid cloud, until we reached the dingy lodgings we had booked somewhere in Margaret Street. The sight of the rooms, with their dilapidated furniture and the tawdry, clumsy ornaments that covered every available space on the walls and mantelpiece, was not calculated to revive our spirits. I went to the window, and tried to catch a glimpse of the street, but the lace curtains which hid the view were so dirty that I refrained from moving them. They seemed in such a state of decay that I feared to see them crumble to pieces at the lightest touch. A dull rumbling of wheels could be heard from below,

mingled with the rattle of a barrel-organ. The whole town seemed to be muffled in thick bitter smoke, which isolated every cab and every passer-by, and, creeping through doors and windows, insinuated itself into every house and pursued its unfortunate victims to the very sanctuary of their hearths.

It was only when the fire had been lighted by a reluctant slavey, who grumbled something to the effect that things were not done at such hours, and that she had not been engaged to wait on foreigners, that we were able to take stock of the situation.

Charles had been the faithful companion of a number of rambles through Switzerland and Italy. We had walked cheerfully side by side, stick in hand and knapsack on back, through many strange and sometimes painful adventures. Our means being strictly limited, we were in the habit of taking discomfort as a matter of course. In odd corners of the Valais and the Grisons, in obscure townlets of Tuscany and Umbria, we had smelt all kinds of smells, eaten all kinds of meat, and been eaten by all kinds of insects—but we had never found ourselves in such a depressing plight as this. Charles used to hum appropriate tunes in such circumstances. The way he now sang "One misty moisty morning, when cloudy was the weather," while walking

disconsolately round the room, was positively heart-rending. We had come all the way from Brussels in order to visit the London picture galleries and to increase our knowledge of Italian art. Our holiday would be over in a week, and we found ourselves condemned to spend most of our time in our rooms confronted by odious coloured prints illustrating the Four Ages of Mankind. Day after day the gloom persisted. It nearly choked the electric lights in the National Gallery. All we could do was to wander from room to room, identifying well-known Lippis, Piero della Francescas, and Botticellis, and pointing out the pictures we longed to see but which only appeared to us through a gloomy and dirty haze.

Towards the end of the week, the pea-soup (we had learnt its true name by then) lifted at last above the houses, but it remained suspended over us like a black threatening pall, plunging the city into mournful twilight. We were evidently under a curse. Our spirits were broken. Charles had stopped singing long ago. His optimism had been reduced to a thin, ominous whistle. Even the exuberant little waiter at the Italian restaurant whither we repaired at noon did not succeed in shaking off our torpor. "This is nothing, Messieurs," he would say, waving his short arms.

"They call it the high fog. It will last until the wind rises and blows away the soot—for it is all soot, little bits of dirt filling the sky." And he waved his table-napkin as if to bring them down. They did come down, all day long, in a slow shower of black snow, resting everywhere, blackening everything, soiling our clothes, begriming our very souls.

Thanks to artificial light, nevertheless, we saw a few beautiful things; for, giving up all plans of systematic study, we had by then decided on a series of roving expeditions to the principal museums. We even went to St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey —I suppose it was by day, though it might just as well have been by night. We were so desperately demoralised that we "did" London in three days, like a couple of Americans on their honeymoon.

We visited these places with the impression of walking in a nightmare. The masterpieces before which we passed were not real. They belonged to a brighter world. They had come from Greece and Italy, and had been exiled under those lowering skies through the influence of some evil magic.

We left London with all our illusions shattered over the threadbare carpet of the Margaret Street rooms. I little dreamt, when I greeted the sun with a shout of joy as the boat sailed from Dover, that

within a few months I should return to that befogged country, there to spend the better part of my life.

This account of my first visit may appear exaggerated to the younger generation, which has reaped the benefit of a more rational system of coal consumption and of the increasing use of electricity. It is, however, scrupulously true. It is impossible to exaggerate the horrible effect that the combination of damp, soot and darkness can produce on an outsider. H. G. Wells has written a gruesome story called *The Country of the Blind.* England appeared to me, for a time, the Country of Darkness, on which the sun was never allowed to shine and where men only preserved their sight the better to feel the cruelty of not being able to use it.

In order to cure the melancholy of those who are fond of bewailing the evils of their age, it is sometimes proposed to whisk them back to an earlier period of history, in which they would find life so uncomfortable that they would only be too glad to return to their present troubles. Such a miracle is scarcely necessary. Let them only appreciate fully the oppression caused by the first foggy day which comes into their life, and realise the heroic efforts made by their forebears to preserve their optimism and cheerfulness when treated to a week or a fortnight of the same evil.

I imagine that some of these ingrained optimists must regret the past fogs as a retired Christian martyr might regret his past trials. Think of Dickens, for instance, writing the first pages of *The Chimes* in a fit of nostalgia, under a clear Italian sky.

I always associate that first unhappy adventure on English soil with the hundred singularities and apparent contradictions in English life which tried my temper severely when I came to settle definitely in this country. I do not in the least wish to be provocative in stating them plainly in this foggy chapter. When accused of insularity and contrariness, the English might very well retort that, in being what they are, they exercise a natural right, and that even if nobody else behaved as they do, this would not be a sufficient reason for saying that they are in the wrong. It may suit an islander to keep to the left when driving, though a whole continent prefers to keep to the right. It may even suit him to make confusion worse confounded by keeping to the right on the pathway when he keeps to the left on the road. It may also suit him to ignore the decimal system and to throw logic to the winds by dividing every penny into four farthings, every shilling into twelve pence and every pound into twenty shillings. He may scorn, if he wishes, the drab and utilitarian decimal system of

weights and measures, and religiously preserve his picturesque and elaborate tradition of counting by inches, feet, yards, rods, furlongs and miles (to mention only the most usual), each of which contains an unequal number of the other. Why should an Englishman confine himself to the simple drudgery of grammes and kilogrammes, when he can indulge in variations worthy of the greatest composers, in three different systems of weights, with such suggestive names as Troy, Avoirdupois and Apothecaries'? Think of the greater delight it must give to a man to absorb a quart of beer, or the fourth part of a gallon, or the thirty-sixth part of a firkin, or the seventy-second part of a kilderkin, instead of swallowing a mere litre!

At the same time, the bewildered young continental who settles in this country may well find it somewhat difficult to remember that he must always keep on the outside of the pavement, which compels him to dance round the lady whenever they cross a street and makes conversation rather spasmodic. He will be thrown into confusion again and again by the astonished stare with which his bow is met when it anticipates the lady's. Feeling naturally anxious to display his good manners, he will flourish his hat in the air, only to be told that he has blundered again by not giving the woman a

chance of ignoring him if she chose. Then, there is that business of the gloves! As a boy, he had been told to keep them neatly buttoned. How could he foresee that to offer a gloved hand would become an insult? If, in despair, he avoids the company of women, he finds himself thrown into fresh difficulties by warmly shaking hands with some supercilious gentleman to whom he has just been introduced. If he is prudent he will take the hint and curb the manifestations of his cordiality, but if he is bold enough to try and dispel the awkwardness of his position by a few loud remarks and guffaws of laughter, it will take him years to recover the ground he has lost.

One of the oldest chestnuts favoured by after-dinner speakers is concerned with an explorer, who lands consecutively on three desert islands. On the first, he meets two men engaged in a fierce theological discussion; on the second, two men fighting for all they are worth; and, on the third, two men walking calmly on either side of the islet, without taking the slightest notice of each other. The first two are of course, Scotch, the second Irish, and, as to the third, it is enough to point out that they have not been introduced to realise that they can only be English.

We may sympathise with these two victims of a

strict etiquette, but we must sympathise even more with the unfortunate foreigner who finds himself landed in the midst of some crush at an At-Home, to be stared at and shoved out of the way, but never to meet with a friendly glance or word. The two grotesque Crusoes were at least aware of the cause of their isolation. The foreigner is left to wonder what terrible mistake he can have made in his speech or dress, that a hostess who presumably wished to see him there should go out of her way to inflict upon him such a cruel humiliation. He tries in vain to understand why an etiquette, which seems to him particularly rigid and difficult to practise, should also lack the unctuous style of speech and manners which go so far to make life easy abroad. He feels snubbed by the casual nod he receives in exchange for his ceremonious greeting, and by the "yours truly" which falls like a cold douch on "the assurances of his highest consideration and devoted sentiments." He feels that, however hard he tries, he is making a fool of himself among people who have made an age-long study of avoiding ridicule. He becomes more and more sensitive, and slowly develops a persecution complex. He sees his suspicions confirmed by the sanguinary adjective which street-talk couples with the word "foreigner," and by the alternative of "alien" used in official documents.

If he is foolish enough to seek comfort from his friends, he risks being assured that any discourtesy —or, for the matter of that, any gross or inhospitable behaviour—is essentially "un-English."

The fog usually lifts after a certain time. We may even say that it always lifts for those who have the patience to wait. But, as long as it lasts, strangers live in a world of confusion and topsy-turvydom, a kind of land of the Houyhnhnms, where everything is done not only in a different way, but in exactly the opposite way from anywhere else, where King's Ministers lay their feet beside their papers on the Table of the House, where seasoning is added to the dishes in the dining-room instead of the kitchen, where, to use Voltaire's words, there are "fifty different religions but only one sauce," and where these religions are advertised cheek by jowl with a certain type of cigarette or cough-lozenge in Tubes and tramways. After all these years, I must confess that I still feel a shock on being warned at my railway station that "The Lord has revealed to Swedenborg that the purpose of creation is a heaven from the human race," and on being reminded in my Tube carriage of the words of Paul's gaoler: "What must I do to be saved?"

A foreign explorer in England has no difficulty in getting at the facts. Indeed, they stare at him from

every hoarding, newspaper and Blue Book, and grow as thick in London and every industrial town as the spring flowers in an English meadow. He suffers rather from a plethora of information. His trouble begins when he tries to classify and reconcile the varied and sometimes contradictory results of his observations. Some very disturbing questions then arise, as, for instance: Why are the English at one and the same time so progressive and so conservative? Why, producing as they do such admirable literature and works of art, do they appear to take so little interest in them? Why are they so full of human sympathy, yet so tolerant of disgraceful social conditions?

Few people will question the progressive character of English civilisation, at least since the industrial revolution. During the last hundred years, England has given the lead to Europe in regard to technical development and trade, and has shown an almost exaggerated confidence in her future destiny. There is no people among whom the dogma of progress has done at the same time so much good and so much harm. The reckless way in which public monuments, historical treasures and famous landscapes have been sacrificed or spoilt to make way for modern "improvements" has only recently begun to alarm public opinion. In all

practical matters, England has shown herself to be extraordinarily efficient and ready to throw off all hampering restrictions from her economic and administrative organisation. She has reduced red tape and formalities to a strict minimum—at least compared with other countries. And yet, besides this and in spite of this, her people have preserved an amazing number of old traditions, which might be thought by some to be obsolete or even incongruous, but which have been almost religiously maintained with all the ritual attached to them, and are regularly observed by thousands of people who must have forgotten—if they ever knew them—their meaning and their origin.

There are some obvious examples, to be found in legal and Parliamentary procedure and Court functions, which, though sufficiently amazing from an outsider's point of view, are almost taken for granted here. Still, even Englishmen may wonder why the Lord Mayor's Show has been so carefully preserved since the thirteenth century, together with the replica of the famous gilded coach which, in the eighteenth century, replaced the stalwart horse, which had in its turn succeeded the Mayoral barge, which had itself taken the place of the medieval procession on foot. It may also occur to them, while waiting patiently in a traffic-block caused by

a students' demonstration on Guy Fawkes' Day, that the failure of the Gunpowder Plot, on November 5th, 1605, is no sufficient reason for people to miss their appointments and their trains some three centuries later.

It is impossible to spend a few days in England without coming across other quaint customs of this kind, but it would take years to unravel their real meaning. The old schools and universities are literally honeycombed with them. As for the City Companies, they are in themselves a challenge to time and change. After showing very properly that it is a great honour for any man to be a Grocer, a Fishmonger, or a Haberdasher, they disappoint all expectations by producing Grocers who no longer sell groceries, Fishmongers who eat fish instead of selling it, and Hàberdashers who would be unable to tell a hook from an eye. Such benevolent societies in fancy-dress exist all over the country. The Bristol Bellringers, for instance, instead of merely ringing bells, have taken over the upkeep of St. Stephen's. They meet in the Church Hall every year at a banquet, where the Charter conferred upon them by Queen Elizabeth is solemnly read, and where they march round the table behind an official carrying a stuffed fox on a platter for no other reason than that Simon Renard, as Spanish

Ambassador in London, negotiated the unfortunate marriage of Philip and Mary.

Sometimes the connection between the title of the society and its real function is even more remote. Some years ago I spent a few delightful evenings drinking beer with a number of London journalists, who called themselves "Whitefriars," presumably because Fleet Street is near the site of an old Carmelite monastery. The Chairman for the evening never failed to read, or to recite if he could remember it, a long prayer in ornate seventeenth century English, which contained an allusion to certain exiled brethren pining away "in Alsatia." I longed to ask whether the old White Friars had been connected with some Alsatian monastery, whither weaker brothers were sent as a penance for their sins. Luckily, however, I kept my own counsel until, when reading Scott's *Fortunes of Nigel*, I realised that, according to English historical geography, Alsatia was not situated on the continent but in London, E.C., and that the allusion no doubt applied to some pamphleteers who, having got into trouble with the powers that were, had been compelled to seek refuge in that ancient sanctuary. The Club having been founded in the nineteenth century, I could only assume that the prayer had been introduced into the proceedings for sheer love of tradition.

Without being guilty of hasty generalisation, we may ask ourselves why progressive politicians, efficient city merchants, brisk business men and go-ahead journalists should encumber themselves with such customs. If time is indeed money, which is questionable, a good deal of money would seem to be wasted for some inscrutable reason.

My principal interests being literary and artistic, I was naturally led to explore the resources of London's theatres, concerts and public exhibitions. Almost my first question, on the day of my arrival, was to ask where I could see a good Shakespearean production. I was somewhat crestfallen at being told that no Shakespeare play was to be seen at the time. After waiting three months, I at last found my way to His Majesty's Theatre, to see *The Tempest*. It was undoubtedly a tempest. The whole stage rocked with the ship, and the storm-effects were most convincing and ingeniously contrived. But it was certainly not Shakespeare's *Tempest*, though it was possible to recognise from time to time, throughout the gorgeous tableaux that followed, some snippets of his words. Great prominence was given to a hairy Caliban, who climbed practicable trees, and the curtain fell on a touching scene showing the monster shading his eyes with his hand as he watched his master's ship disappear in the

distance. In accordance with the old adage which warns you that you cannot eat your cake and have it too, about thirty per cent. of the words had been cut out.

It was explained to me that these costly and luxurious productions were expected by the London public, and that, if I wished for something simpler with more respect for the original, I must turn my attention to the praiseworthy efforts made by some provincial companies to cultivate the Shakespearean drama in a true and disinterested spirit. Had I had the gift of prophecy, I should have guessed that from the enthusiasm and self-sacrifice shown by these touring companies and their managers a new school of production and acting would gradually develop, and completely alter repertory performances in England. But I had no prophetic gift and, with the intolerant impatience of youth, I expected great achievements from the natural heirs of Shakespeare's genius. Having seen a performance of the Meininger a few months before, I felt justified in claiming from England at least as good results as those I had obtained from Germany. Only the older generation of my readers will realise the bitterness of my disappointment and understand my indignation when I heard that some sporting manager, wishing to complete his company, and attaching more

importance to the athletic than to the artistic capabilities of his actors, was responsible for the following announcement: "Wanted, a good full-back, capable of playing Laertes."[1]

Thanks to the good work of such pioneers as William Poel, Granville Barker and Miss Hornimann, the situation has considerably improved of late years, but the old errors are by no means forgotten. The foundations of the National Theatre are not yet laid, and, in spite of the Old Vic and all it stands for, there is still a large discrepancy between the artistic value of Shakespearean literature, and the appreciation given to it in the poet's own country.

I have dwelt at some length on this extreme case because it illustrates perfectly the difficulty I met with at every turn during the first years I spent in England. I knew too much about English art, literature and music to share the current continental prejudices concerning "England's intellectual inferiority." I realised even then that this country was unrivalled with regard to poetry, that it possessed a school of painting comparable to the Dutch and the French, and that it had held in the past, and was holding again in the present, a very important position in the world of music; but I could not

[1] I do not vouch for the accuracy of this story. Not having, at the time it was told, explored the intricacies of English humour, I was not tempted to question the veracity of my informant.

possibly understand the strange eclecticism of the English taste which coupled masterpieces with second-rate productions, spoke in the same breath of *The Messiah* and *Elijah*, placed Millais' anecdotes besides Turner's landscapes in the Tate Gallery, crowded the walls of the Academy with story-book illustrations and conventional frock-coats, and seemed unable to distinguish between clever detective stories and great psychological novels.

I could not very well solve the problem by accusing the English of lacking taste, since, in a thousand ways—in house architecture, furniture, materials, even women's dress—I was struck, again and again, by the refinement of their sense of colour and proportion. For a long time, therefore, I remained non-plussed by England's theatres, concerts and galleries, as I had been by her slums and her old customs. I lived in a world of fog and contradiction, where everything was topsy-turvy and where all ideas were jumbled together in a kind of mad and kaleidoscopic paradox.

My third problem not only puzzled me, as the first had done, but actually filled me with distress, as I wandered, lost in the thickest spiritual fog, through the slums of London, Manchester, or Liverpool. I had had some experience of poor quarters in Belgium, France and Italy—dirty, noisy flats and

overcrowded cottages, with the washing hanging on lines across the street and the children jostling each other on the pavement. I was prepared to witness scenes of squalor, drunkenness and brutality, and to hear insults or coarse jokes hurled from window to window and door to door. But I was not prepared for such miles of drab monotony, sulky darkness and ominous silence. Some of the houses were perhaps not as bad as the worst I had seen abroad, but they were all the same. Some of the people may not have looked as wretched as some I had seen before, but they all looked the same. I had seen worse rags, but these garments were all old and came from the pawnshop; they were old in the sense of never having been new. I had seen poor people wearing the clothes of their trade and taking pride in them, but these people slipped in and out of doors with bent backs and expressionless faces, as if they were hunted by the demon of the place, and had known beforehand that they could not escape from this grim desert of by-streets and alleys, with here and there a pathetic church-tower or the polished brass fittings of a public-house. I almost longed to hear the familiar shouts of wild urchins, the curses of drunkards and the throbbing cry of a beaten woman. Anything would have relieved the oppression of this nightmare: a touch of

bright colour, a tuft of grass, even a human tragedy. There was something more terrible in the resignation shown on every face than in the most outspoken revolt. The streets were too long ; there were too many houses, too many people ; nothing would ever happen, nothing could ever change ; everything would always remain grey, with use and dirt, like the sky. Even the children seemed to have old souls. I felt that, according to D. H. Lawrence's words, " the tragedy of England " was " the tragedy of ugliness."

There were less unemployed in those days, but they were to be seen everywhere, loafing in the London parks, sleeping on the Embankment, or marching along the streets. Comparing their physique with that of the few policemen who controlled them, it seemed natural that they should not resist the strong arm of the law. London was, I was told, the most healthy town in the world. Apparently people were less apt to die there than in other capitals ; I began to ask myself whether they had ever lived.

I remember a disused churchyard in the East End, on a sultry day in June, in which I saw men sleeping on every gravestone, their caps pulled over their eyes, while children played or tried to play on the mangy grass between the tombs. The place

was littered with paper. From time to time one of the loiterers rose, and crossed the street to enter the public bar facing the church. I wondered whether the living were indeed more alive than the dead whose resting-place they used as a dormitory. All the worst continental pictures I could recall to mind —domestic quarrels, street fights, tavern brawls— paled beside this London churchyard. And I asked myself how such a state of things had been allowed to develop among a people who enjoyed the reputation of being the most humane in the world, a people who had uprooted the slave-traffic, who sent missionaries to the most outlandish places, and who had again and again championed the cause of defenceless natives and the rights of weaker nations.

I remember one day in particular when I was plunged in utter darkness. I had received in the morning an urgent and most touching appeal from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and a dear lady had called in the afternoon to urge my wife to sign a protest against vivisection. My head was still buzzing with the crimes of science and the blessings conferred upon animal-kind by dog infirmaries and homes for horses when I escaped for a stroll in Kensington Gardens. I wandered as far as Bayswater Road and looked through the

railings at the fresh restfulness of the dogs' cemetery. The little tombs stood side by side on the well-tended grass near the well-swept path. The sound of violent sniffing drew my attention to a pale urchin standing close to me, who was endeavouring to peep into this paradise, like a small Adam after the Fall. He was not more pitiable than others—a bit ricketty, no doubt, a fair specimen of the two million English children living under slum conditions. He did not beg, he did not cry; he just sniffed again and again, looking longingly through the iron bars of his prison on the wonders of the dogs' cemetery.

CHAPTER IV

MIST

"At eight o'clock the fog was blinding and you could hear the signals of the ships at sea. At nine o'clock it had cleared a little and you could see men as trees walking. At ten it had come on again and it crept into the class-rooms writhing its horrid way about forms and boys and masters. . . . At eleven it was thin again, and at twelve a miserable sun, like a shabby soup-plate, made a ring. At one o'clock there was no fog. The Callendar team had arrived and everyone was singing!"

In these words Hugh Walpole describes the weather on the fateful day of the Crale-Callendar match.[1]

Every stranger, during his first year in England, must pass through the same alternations of gloom and hope, until he begins to see a faint light through the clouds, which at last seems to dispel the confusion of misconceptions that blinded him.

When we are told that "at one o'clock there was no fog left," we must not however rashly assume

[1] *Jeremy at Crale.*

that the visibility was good. Perfect visibility, in the Mediterranean sense of the word, scarcely ever exists at Crale, or in any other part of the country. Fog may vanish, but mist remains. On the clearest days, the distant outlines are still faintly blurred and a grey haze hangs over the horizon. Nature forbids us to see things as they really are; they appear to us, like the actions and thoughts of men, wrapped in a peculiar atmosphere which allows a certain margin of interpretation and favours the exercise of sentiment and imagination.

The Foreign Office is a stately building, but it could not, without exaggeration, be called one of the gems of European architecture. I happened to cross the bridge in St. James's Park, one fine spring morning, and, looking towards the Horse Guards' Parade, I stopped abruptly at the sight of a monumental palace rising high above the trees in the mellow light. The richness of its proportions and material staggered me. I was carried away to Babylon and Nineveh and dreamed that I saw a thousand Arabian princesses waving their scarves from flowering terraces to a crowd of departing warriors. The vision stood out dimly against the sky and harmonised somehow with the delicate foreground of willows and elms, the sheet of water making it still more distant and aloof. It took me

a long time to remember that this was in reality a great storehouse of archives and files which an army of officials kept beautifully tidy in hundreds of cupboards and cabinets. I tried to imagine them flitting about the passages with bundles of papers under their arms or bending over their desks while their chiefs kept on ringing bells and lighting cigarettes. This was made all the more difficult by the presence of the princesses on the roof, still waving and nodding in their spangled dresses. At last a bugle sounded and brought me back to earth.

I suspect that something of the kind must have been felt by my old friend Emile Claus, when he came over to England during the war. He was known in Belgium as the foremost representative of the "luministe" school. If this means that these artists succeeded in painting light, Claus was certainly one of them, for he seemed to hide a sunbeam in his brush. He managed to secure a room at the bottom of Norfolk Street, from the window of which he painted unceasingly for months. Just in front of me, now as I write, hangs a small picture which he gave me when I called on him in his new quarters. It is a glimpse of the river taken from his window in the early morning: mist, of course, with the sun just shining through, lighting up every ripple of water and blazing on a bank of mud on the

opposite side, with its warehouses and massive factory chimney—or is it a minaret?

Claus could not be called an imaginative painter. I have never met a more scrupulous realist; yet the suggestion of fairy architecture and mysterious distance is as much there as in Whistler's visions of the Thames. One cannot paint London without its mirages. If its citizens were more aware of them, business would be sadly neglected. They would book seats for Timbuctoo at every tube station and ask for a penny ride to Shiraz or Ispahan on boarding their accustomed bus.

There is drama as well as illusion in the English weather. When the B.B.C. Announcer speaks to us in an impassive voice of travelling depressions and anticyclones, he is really planning our destinies, for people depend on the weather here more than in any other country. Their health and temper vary with its ever-changing moods. For centuries, it has woven English life in drab and gold. The English sky is spectacular as an Elizabethan drama: not only in the sudden coming and going of fog, but in the appearance and disappearance of the brightest and darkest clouds, when the wind strikes them with its wand. These changes are so rapid and unexpected that every stage of the transformation scene must be watched closely if the meaning of the

heavenly performance is to be grasped. That blue rent in the sky which I see through my window has already become a large gap as I write this line; brilliant snowy clouds are piling up their Himalayas above the London roofs; there they are already, glittering in the spring light, rearing themselves over the grey film which still wraps the town in semi-darkness—no longer wild mountains, but super-human architecture which would reduce the Pyramids to the dimensions of children's toys—terrace upon terrace, columns and pediments, wide-flung arches, crazy buttresses, as if the collective imagination of eight million people had burst suddenly into some fantastic dream and created a new city of pure white marble, relieved with blue and pink shadows, far above the city of black bricks and grimy stone.

Other nations, such as the French, build their castles "in Spain," right away from home, beyond a high mountain-range—Spain might well be as illusory as the castles themselves. But the English build their castles "in the air," that is to say in their own sky, and they depend for the work, not on two giants, as Wotan did, but on four, the North Wind, the South Wind, the East Wind and the West Wind.

There is illusion or sentiment, therefore, in the English mist, which prevents the mind from looking

at things from too close or too rational a point of view, and there is imagination in cloud-architecture which encourages the wildest flights of fancy. In no country in the world, both literally and figuratively speaking, are sky and earth more closely bound together than in England. That such features should be apparent in the works of her great landscape painters is inevitable. There are perhaps no two artists more unalike in their technique and methods than Constable and Turner. There is, however, something peculiarly English in the way they both succeed in establishing a perfect balance between their sky and their earth effects. With them the sky is not allowed to dominate the landscape, as in Dutch art, neither does it hold a subordinate position, as in Italian and French art. Titian and Rubens are among the few continental masters who, for similar climatic reasons, succeed in the same way in blending their masses of clouds and trees and their expanses of sky, water or plain.

There is a picture by Turner in the Tate Gallery which seems at first sight entirely elusive: a transparent mist, a little darker in some parts, rather lighter in others, the only distinct object being a brown spot, a deer or a cow (I am inclined to think it is a cow) drinking. It is materially impossible to obtain any impression at all unless one spends a

few minutes in front of the canvas, avoiding as best one can the reflection of the glass which protects it. Only then can the opalescent sheet of water be distinguished from the opalescent sky and only then does the shadow rising on the left appear as an evanescent hill surmounted by a still more evanescent castle. It is called *Norham Castle, Sunrise*, and I may say that it taught me more about England and the English than many books and speeches.

Most continental writers agree that the English show a certain diffidence towards the rigorous deductions of reason and that they are generally unwilling to apply to human affairs the unanswerable conclusions of a legal or mathematical mind. They might also suggest that the mist so prevalent in the English landscape has crept into the English spirit and thrown a film over English eyes. When, for instance, in some international discussion concerning the safeguards which we are endeavouring to secure against war, a continental statesman explains conclusively the necessity of coming to a mutual understanding with regard to "sanctions" or any other means of enforcing the common will against a law-breaking nation, his conclusions will meet with less approval in England than in other countries of western Europe. However skilfully his case is presented, and in spite of the evident value of the

historical and legal arguments on which it is based, the English will always be reluctant to adopt the neatest conclusions drawn from the most convincing premises.

This attitude has done more than anything else to foster abroad the prejudice that "perfidious Albion" will not tie her hands because she wishes to pursue, at any time and in any circumstances, her own selfish policy. A writer in the *Times*, answering such attacks, once endeavoured to turn the tables against a French historian by declaring that "in deciding upon a course of action, the Frenchman argues that A. and B. being true, C. must follow. And if he wishes C. to follow, he is convinced that A. and B. are true. Our method is rather to take a look at A. and B., however much we want C., and to discover that, in a work-a-day world, A. is not quite A. and B. is not quite B., and that therefore something very different from C. follows."

Now this is fair neither to Latin logic nor to English methods of thinking. An honest Frenchman will not assume that A. and B. are true because he wants C., but will only urge C. after having ascertained, by all the intellectual means at his disposal, that A. and B. are true. An honest Englishman will certainly not say that A. is not quite A. and that B. is not quite B,. because he is

far too active to waste his time in sceptical cogitations. He will frankly recognise, as many English statesmen have done in such discussions, that A. is A., that B. is B., and that there are ninety-nine chances out of a hundred that C. will follow, and then he will cause an uproar by declaring that he will have nothing to do with the proposal. He will do so, not because he does not believe in A., B., or C., but because he does not believe in logic, or, more correctly, because he feels instinctively that life is far bigger than human reason and that it might be dangerous to apply such a limited instrument to such an unlimited field. He is quite ready to admit that the A.B.C. syllogism ought to work as far as we can see, as far as reason goes. But, in England, visibility is only good in the foreground and the distance is hazy. For all we know, the whole alphabet may rise out of that mist of the Future at any time, like so many question-marks, and set at naught the wisest decisions of human councils.

The best proof that such diplomatic hesitations are not inspired by purely selfish motives is that the English are just as diffident of logic when dealing with their own internal affairs. Their whole political life is dominated by a system of mutual concessions and compromises. When confronted with the two horns of a dilemma, public opinion

will prefer conciliation to a straight struggle. It certainly seems poor logic to declare that grey is right because one part of the nation clings to black and the other prefers white, but it is good policy, in a country where the crushing of the minority by an intransigent majority is bound to provoke a reaction at the next elections, which will unavoidably reverse the position of the parties.

The same remarkable elasticity is noticeable in English law. While in most continental countries the penal and civil laws have been codified in modern times, all attempts to do the same thing in England have been thwarted by the resistance not only of public opinion, but of the legal profession itself. Legal decisions are based on custom and jurisdiction and, above all, on the sense of equity and justice of the Court. This leaves considerable latitude to the judge, whose decisions, strangely enough, are hardly ever criticised. The English have far more respect for the unwritten law, which is implicitly obeyed, than for recent regulations or for old laws dated by the years of the reign of the monarch in which they were made, most of which have lost all meaning but are nevertheless carefully preserved in the national legal armoury.

If the English are not fond of binding international treaties, neither do they favour the

co-ordination and stiffening of their own national legislation. If they manifest a certain antagonism towards any possible Super-State which might emerge from the League of Nations, they are equally disinclined to reinforce the centralising power of their own national State. If they wish to keep their hands free abroad, they do not allow the most democratic government to tie their hands at home. The old spirit of Greek freedom and individualism, which has been explored in a former chapter, reasserts itself in such matters. Better by far, the English think, to leave decisions to the critical moment than to take steps beforehand in a way which might defeat their purpose; better to temporise and conciliate than to adopt a hard and unflinching attitude; better to wander in the jungle of old customs and disused laws, which afford an outlet in case of need, than to be fenced in by the most up-to-date enclosure which may one day become inadequate and which does not leave sufficient elbow-room for the individuality of the free citizen.

There is, in every English home, a certain room in which may be found the queerest accumulation of disused objects, covered with the dust and rust of time: boxes of old clothes which will never see the light again, pathetic gas-brackets which have had to

give way to electric fittings, disembowelled arm-chairs which are not worth repairing, old cradles which will never see another baby, guns which have ceased to shoot, golf clubs which have given up clubbing, and banjos which have broken their strings and lost their voice. Coming across such a medley of rubbish, the outsider will scratch his head and ask himself why on earth the lady of the house, whom he knows to be most efficient and orderly, does not get rid of these things to make use of the room for some intelligible purpose. He may even, if he is sufficiently intimate with her, raise the question as a modest contribution to the welfare of the family, trusting that this suggestion will meet with complete approval. Need I add that his audacity will not obtain the reward it so well deserves? It will be useless for him to try and bolster up utilitarian arguments with Christian ones, and to say that these discarded objects might have given pleasure to others, if they had been given away before they had been destroyed by lying idle so long. He will be properly snubbed and told to mind his own business: "I do not know what your continental housewife would do with such things, but I have kept them and I am going to keep them, because they may come in useful some day." The stranger will be wise to let it rest at that, for if he hints that fashions have

changed and that it is not likely that gas will come into its own again, he may run into worse trouble.

This kind of box-room or lumber-room is not only characteristic of the English home but of all English institutions. There is a positive objection in England to anything that looks like "scrapping." Past traditions and titles and costumes are essentially respectable[1]; they may have become useless, but if they do no good they can certainly do no harm, and then—who knows?—there is an attractive element of doubt as to their future destiny. The English, for these reasons, preserve their seventeenth century University gowns, their Warden of the Cinque Ports, and such obsolete ministerial titles as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Lord Privy Seal. They retain the mediæval edict according to which no Member of Parliament is allowed to resign, and the old institution of the Chiltern Hundreds, and they neutralise any inconvenience caused by the first of these rules by allowing any Member no longer in agreement with his Party to apply for a Stewardship in this institution. The Beefeaters make a good show on the day of the Opening of Parliament, and

[1] So also is the most puzzling and difficult spelling to be found among all European languages. While other countries have at least made an effort to reconcile spelling with pronunciation, England will resist to the last America's zeal for reform.

the Guy Fawkes carnival enlivens the gloom of our November climate:

> I sing a doleful tragedy,
> Guy Fawkes, that Prince of Sinisters,
> Who once blew up the House of Lords,
> The King and all his Ministers;
> That is, he would have blown 'em up,
> And folks won't soon forget him:
> His will was good to do the deed,
> That is, if they'd ha' let him.

Remote things take on a slightly solemn or grotesque aspect for which the English show a peculiar appreciation. One of my friends came to consult me the other day about the lease of a flat which he wished to take somewhere near Baker Street. He could not quite understand why, the flat being on the third floor, he should solemnly undertake to keep neither cows, pigs, nor fowls in it. "Fowls, perhaps," he protested in "my bath-room; but where could I keep a pig or a cow, unless it be on the roof, tied to a chimney-stack?" I tried to explain to this benighted foreigner that the original lease must have been drafted some time in the eighteenth century, when the place was the site of a suburban villa, and when the Baker Street landowners wished to guarantee their tenants against the unseemly odours of neighbouring farm-yards. "But it is no longer so," he insisted.

"Why then keep the clause in the lease? What is the use of it? Is it to increase the lawyer's fee, or is it only an English joke?" I wonder.

Now Conservatism is not peculiarly English. There are other countries, agricultural countries in particular, where the majority has a far greater worship for the past, as such, than the most obstinate Die-Hard. The English do not wish to preserve for preservation's sake, in order to build up a bulwark against forthcoming changes. It is not because they dread the future that they are fond of the past. Alone among nations, they are equally well-disposed towards the Middle Ages and towards the wildest prophecies concerning the present and the coming centuries. Their adoration for the latest lady record-breaker may not last as long as their enthusiasm for Joan of Arc, but it is no less sincere. The present is not, for them, a hard line of demarcation between two opposite worlds, but a gentle mist through which they wander leisurely, turning sometimes to the right towards a group of knights galloping out of a Moat House, sometimes to the left towards a number of Robots flying from the tops of sky-scrapers. They are essentially progressive, but they wish to keep with them all their household gods; they do not see why, because new things come, the old ones should go. So they travel through time,

as they do indeed through space, dragging behind them a quantity of useless luggage. It may be rather expensive, but they have been well able to afford it up till now, and they wish to keep it up even in times of stress, if only to prove to themselves that they will soon be able to afford it again.

Logic, for other nations, might dictate a definite choice between two definite policies, two definite social conceptions. Confronted by certain principles such as kingship or the brotherhood of man, they will feel bound to take sides for or against the defenders of the old or the new order, to follow either one or the other of the two divergent roads. The English prefer to keep an open mind, to bide their time, to find a *via media* and to take the best out of both worlds. Their king becomes a constitutional king, their suffrage remains for centuries a strictly limited suffrage. This wary progressiveness can scarcely be called opportunism. It is not merely the result of the wily expediency of sceptical statesmen. It derives, when all is said, from the unconscious conviction that sheer reason is unable to cope with human affairs and that

> There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Carlyle's favourite argument that mankind would not have favoured certain ideas and institutions if

they had not contained some elements of truth may seem unconvincing to the Latin mind, but it affords a good example of this English method of relying on experience and instinct for the solution of social problems.

It is probably owing to this remarkable open-mindedness, which makes for patience and compromise in political relations and combines a strong traditionalism with a natural readiness for material progress and social reform, that England succeeded in avoiding the series of revolutions which so deeply disturbed continental countries during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Great Rebellion of 1649 is the only serious revolution to be registered in modern English history. With this single exception the inclusion of the Third State into the political body of the nation occurred gradually and peacefully, while the final extension of the suffrage to all citizens, without distinction of sex or property, took, at the time, the form of a spontaneous offer rather than that of a concession to public demands.

The first leaders of the French Revolution of 1789 looked upon England as a most progressive country in which the power of the Executive was strictly limited by Parliament. Their aim was to establish in France a constitutional monarchy "on the English model." But they had to deal with a

country so deeply ravaged by the evils of the old régime, that the building of a bridge between the past and the future had become impossible. Rousseau's doctrine of man's natural goodness and of equal rights conferred by citizenship, led inevitably to the conclusion that, if all the forces of oppression could be held in check, the new Republic (it was already a Republic) would inaugurate an idyllic age of bliss. After a few months, French logic had left the English half-way house far behind. England, who had at first seemed an example to be followed, soon became the worst enemy of the new order of things, for she had realised, with Burke, that the light of Reason was the light that failed and that theoretical equality could only lead to despotism in an uneducated democracy. The Revolution "devoured her own children," and the Jacobins, headed by Robespierre, the true disciple of Rousseau, prostrated themselves in Notre Dame before the Goddess of Reason, as impersonated by Mademoiselle Candeille of the Opera. It took France five years to realise, at the cost of untold massacres and cruelty, that men were not quite as good as Rousseau thought them to be, even after all churches had been closed and most aristocrats exiled or guillotined. In the name of Freedom, therefore, Napoleonic despotism succeeded Revolutionary tyranny.

All this was perfectly reasonable and inevitable, when once Rousseau's premises were accepted; it was as logical as the metric system introduced by the Convention and as the Civil Code enforced by the Empire.

The application of any dogmatic principle to social government is bound to let loose the forces of fanaticism against all real or supposed opponents, and among all such principles there is none which makes men so bad as the one which proclaims that they are perfectly good, and none which charges their souls with a heavier load of sin than the one which affirms that they are sinless. For if something goes wrong, as wrong something must go, the nature of man being by no means perfect, a scapegoat must immediately be sacrificed to account for the evil done. All revolutions are religious at the root, even when, like the French or the Russian Revolutions, they seem to be directed against religion. The cruelty which follows is merely caused by the exasperation provoked in the leaders and their followers by the impossibility of achieving the unachievable, that is to say of installing the Kingdom of God on earth, by force. The more high-minded the leader, the more dangerous he proves. Mirabeau had his blemishes, but knowing human nature for what it is and for what he was, he showed

himself sensible and moderate in public affairs. Robespierre, on the other hand, was virtuous and incorruptible, and proved himself to be devoid of all human feelings. The visibility in the Constituante was fortunately still veiled by doubts ; it became so good in the Convention that every Frenchman began to fear for his life.

Meanwhile, triumphant England pursued her calm progressive course, adding a few reforms to her Constitution while preserving practically all her old institutions, including her medieval laws and her obsolete system of weights and measures. Such are the advantages of the instinctive, as opposed to the rational, method of dealing with human affairs.

CHAPTER V

THE IVY AND THE HEDGES

In one of his earlier essays, dated 1909, G. K. Chesterton tells us of how, returning from a holiday, he shared a compartment with an American lady on the Dover-London train. This lady, who had never been in England before, had seemed particularly struck by the amount of ivy that was allowed to choke the trees, cover the church steeples, and bury the houses. While she had been looking at the Kent scenery, Chesterton had been reading in his paper a speech by Lord—then Mr.—Balfour, in defence of the House of Lords, which was represented by him as the mouthpiece of "permanent public opinion above the ebb and flow of the parties." When, therefore, his companion began to enlarge upon the quaint beauty of the English countryside, the author could not help establishing some connection between the picturesque appearance given to things by the all-pervading creeper and the unreal nature of Mr. Balfour's remarks.

For one moment—let us hope it was a short one—he seems to regret that the sharp outlines of

English buildings should so often be blurred by foliage, and to deplore that things in this country are not "attacked or defended for what they are" —a very un-English feeling, almost worthy of a foreigner. He also contends that the very rich members of the Upper House are scarcely qualified to give an opinion as to the wants of the very poor, and that one must not seek the truth about Hoxton in Hatfield: "If the Conservative defender of the House of Lords," he concludes, "were a logical French politician, he would simply be a liar. But being an English politician he is simply a poet."

The question is whether the French method of looking at things as they *are*—at least, as one assumes they are—and of attacking or defending them on that ground, is preferable to the English method of attacking or defending things for what they *mean*, or for what they have meant, or for what they may mean again. That is where Mr. Balfour's poetry, history, or prophecy, comes in. According to him, the House of Lords must have a restraining influence on the House of Commons, torn by its party struggles. The Lords, being outside the turmoil of competition, may be well fitted to interpret public opinion apart from party politics, and to preserve the main principles of English traditional

policy at home and abroad. Mr. Balfour should not have been reproached for doing what every English statesman has done so successfully for the last two hundred years, in adapting old institutions to fresh circumstances and discovering unexpected democratic virtues in obviously aristocratic privileges.

At the time when the speech was made, England was plunged in an acute political crisis which, in foreign eyes, could only be solved by the triumph of democracy or by a humiliating defeat. After more than twenty years, no progress whatsoever has been made. The English public is still patiently waiting for the ever-promised, ever-postponed reform of the Upper House, while an ever-greater number of government created Labour Peers "infuses new blood into its ancient body." In face of this brilliant array of social experts, it cannot now be argued that the very poor—who are no longer quite so poor—do not possess able advocates among the very rich —who are no longer quite so rich.

This is not to say that the methods of patience and conciliation favoured in this country in contrast to the radical measures taken abroad are always successful and that evolution invariably scores over Revolution. There is a distinct danger that, in certain circumstances, the ivy may, if not stifle the

tree, at least seriously hamper its growth. A number of letters have lately appeared in the press concerning the ravages which the creeper has made among historic ruins and hundreds of old churches. Measures are being taken in several dioceses to cope with the evil, and parishioners are urged to subscribe to the preservation of these monuments, much as if the latter had been unexpectedly attacked by a crowd of iconoclastic demons. A mere alien is tempted to answer applications of this kind by remarking that England is the only country where ivy is allowed to take such liberties, and that the authorities which show today such sudden zeal for expensive repairs might have foreseen the danger and prevented it at very little cost by having the plant uprooted and cut down before it had assumed such dragon-like proportions.

The dangers of conciliation, postponement, and procrastination are perhaps not so evident as the pitfalls of strict logic and rational cocksureness, but they are nevertheless real and sometimes insidious. If two ignorant children were put in charge of a garden, the one who would hesitate to weed it out for fear of losing some valuable plant might obtain better results than the one who would wield the hoe indiscriminately and lay waste the ground, in his zeal for the destruction of parasites. There are

certain cases, however, when such zeal is justified by results, and when traditionalism leads a nation to an impasse from which she may have difficulty in extricating herself.

There are a good many things to surprise the outsider travelling through this country for the first time. The American lady crossing Kent only wondered at the "ivy-mantled tower." Going further north myself, I felt a similar surprise on finding great tracts of fallow and pasture land in such a densely populated country. My astonishment increased when I realised the gravity of the unemployment problem. How could I reconcile these two facts? Having at that time but a hazy knowledge of English history and social conditions, I wondered why all this available labour was not used up in agriculture, and why sheep were allowed to graze where corn, beetroots, or cabbages might have grown for the asking. My wonder increased still further when I read alarming accounts of the critical situation of the "first national industry," owing to the difficulty of obtaining labour and to the prohibitive cost of production.

Comparing the agricultural situation of England with that of other countries, I found that the number of people engaged in the industry, the size of the cultivated area, and the production per acre, are

proportionately much smaller here, while the size of the holdings is much larger. Knowing that one of the main sources of Belgian agricultural prosperity lies in the small farms run by one family with a minimum of outside labour, I was bound to connect the English system of land-ownership with the gradual decline of the agricultural population during the last eighty years and the exceptional difficulties experienced by the English farmer. My suspicions were confirmed when, overcoming a natural dislike for statistics, I found out that, according to an estimate made by Professor Clay, there were only 436,000 agricultural holdings in England and Wales, in 1913, of which 49,000 were occupied by their owners; while the corresponding figures in France, in 1908, were 5,505,000 and 2,200,000.

Pursuing the same line of thought, I fell to wondering what would happen to England if, without even increasing her cultivated area, her agricultural conditions were brought into line with those prevailing in most continental countries, and how many people could be employed on the land if culture were thus intensified. I found out that, according to German standards, the English figure of 1,330,000, representing the agricultural population according to the last census, would have to be

increased to 2,000,000; according to Dutch standards, to 2,750,000; and, according to Belgian standards, to well over 3,000,000.[1]

"It is all so simple," I murmured. "Why didn't they think of it before? The State has only to buy land, divide it up into smallholdings, and distribute it among the out-of-work population."

With childlike confidence in my political abilities, I naturally hastened to disclose my solution to the first English friend I met. It was then that my disillusionment began. I was told that my discovery had been made long ago, and even acted upon, and that, if the theory had worked, the pre-war Smallholdings Acts ought to have transformed the English countryside by now. But the theory did not work, firstly because, in many cases, local authorities did not exercise the powers given to them by law, and secondly because the industrial unemployed were neither inclined nor often physically able to undertake hard agricultural work.

It was useless for me to argue that such a state of affairs could never occur in another country. I

[1] *Britain's Industrial Future*, page 324. These figures are based on the ratio of persons to agricultural area. They would be considerably larger if any possible increase in the cultivated area were to be taken into account.

was mildly reminded that England was surrounded by the sea, that she had stood aside from the rest of Europe throughout history, and that any argument based on disparaging comparisons between this country and the rest of the world was not likely to be accepted by a nation particularly proud of its insularity. Faced with such crushing objections, I gave up all hope of forcing my patent cure upon such a refractory patient. I decided, however, to pursue my private investigations as to the real cause of his complaint.

In the course of these investigations, my attention was drawn to another characteristic feature of the English countryside, which helped me to a better understanding of the subject.

Besides the ivy, the grazing sheep and the fallow land, I noticed the hedges running on both sides of winding lanes, enclosing fields, pastures and game preserves, and giving the land the appearance of the chess-board in *Alice through the Looking-Glass*. Anyone staying for some time in England must share the attachment that the English feel for their overgrown hedges heavy with white may in the spring, and with red hips and haws in the autumn. They have been sung or described by every English writer worthy of the name, and praised for the flowers and birds they shelter :

And in the warm hedge grew lush eglantine,
Green cow-bind and the moonlight-coloured may,
And cherry blossoms, and white cups, whose wine,
Was the bright dew yet drain'd not by the day.[1]

Hedges may seem a useless ornament to the foreigner, since a few stones might do just as well to mark the boundaries of the fields; but they are undoubtedly "warm" and comfortable; they provide shelter from the wind, and give a feeling of intimacy which contrasts favourably with some of the unbroken stretches of agricultural country in Northern Europe.

It is a curious paradox that a country of large estates should have this appearance of being divided up between millions of peasant-owners, while the eye can wander over countries of smallholdings without being arrested by any apparent barriers. And it is stranger still that this character should be given to the English countryside by the very hedges which did so much to drive the English free peasant from the land, thus creating the terrible gap between town and country which is at the root of England's present agricultural and industrial trouble.

While revolutionary France and the countries which came under her influence were confiscating

[1] Shelley: *A Dream of the Unknown*. Verlaine's instinct did not fail to grasp this essential feature of the English landscape (*L'Echelonnement des Haies*).

the estates of the " émigrés " and of the clergy, and dividing them among a large number of small owners, the English landlords, by enforcing the Enclosure Acts, were annexing most of the common-land and ruining the so-called free peasant who was dependent on the common for his living. While this new class of continental small-owners remained attached to the land, in spite of the industrial revolution, the English agricultural population—which was not directly dependent on the landlords as tenants or employees—had no alternative but to answer the call of the towns which offered employment at remunerative wages. While, in France, Germany and Belgium, there exists a certain balance between agricultural and industrial life which affects these countries' tariff policy, in England, with the extension of the franchise, agricultural interests were entirely outweighed by the industrial boom of the last century. While, in these continental countries, many industrial workers have not entirely lost touch with the land and are able to turn their hands to the scythe or the plough in times of stress, the proportion of English town workers who still hear the call of the land has become alarmingly small, and agriculture cannot be relied upon at present as a second line of defence against the evils of unemployment.

Modern England accepted the principles of eighteenth century liberty not as an abstract doctrine belonging to the French gospel of the Rights of Man, but as the concrete expression of a natural tendency towards individualism and decentralisation. Theoretical freedom was therefore not associated here, as in France, with a strong centralised State, ready or even anxious to interfere to some or to no purpose, but with a non-interfering government which did not feel called upon to regulate the natural course of events. The free peasantry, having no power in the land, was crushed out of existence and, by the time the industrial workers were able to make their influence felt, economic liberty, as exercised by the moneyed class, had covered large quarters of English industrial towns with squalid tenements which, as is now universally recognised, must be swept away if the race is to be saved from permanent deterioration.

The development of this evil was not allowed to pass unnoticed. The most popular Victorian writers, such as Dickens, Carlyle and Ruskin, were the first to denounce it, in violent and prophetic language. The conscience of the nation rebelled against the excesses of capitalism at an earlier date and in a more decisive manner in England than in any other country. These protests remained long

without result, not only on account of the resistance of the privileged classes, but mainly because they ran across the sacred principle of non-intervention. English democracy defeated its own ends by wishing to protect the defenceless worker without interfering with the law of supply and demand. Englishmen are fond of calling their home their castle. If they had not misapplied the idea of individual freedom expressed by this image, they would not be faced today with the necessity of destroying the slums into which, for millions of them, this castle has been transformed.

Owing doubtless to the influence of religious Individualism and to the worship of private conscience, political individualism has been allowed to assert itself in England as it has done nowhere else. The Englishman's home is not only a castle in which he can challenge intrusion, but a castle from the towers of which he may, if he chooses, spread disease upon the surrounding countryside, and behind the gates of which he is free to retire if he does not care to fight. An English child need not be vaccinated if his parents' have some conscientious objection to preserving him and his companions from the attacks of smallpox. An Englishman need not join the army, even if the very life of his country is threatened, if he finds it easier to forgive the enemy

for killing his own people than to forgive himself for killing the enemy. Faith in the discipline of an overwhelming majority is so strong that such exceptions are allowed, if only to safeguard the sacred principle of individual freedom. But, if the number of social cranks is comparatively negligible, the number of intellectual and religious cranks is much greater. The English are quite justified in accusing some foreigners of having no sense of humour, but a certain number of them seem to glory in the most fatuous creeds. Some do not believe in Shakespeare, while others believe in the Lost Tribes of Israel; some do not rely on beer, while others pin their faith on vegetables. It seems as if there were more virtue in having the courage of an absurd conviction than of a sound one.

When once this attitude of the English towards the State is fully realised, the apparent lack of appreciation with regard to art, literature, the theatre and music, which was so conspicuous twenty years ago, can easily be justified. It is not fair to compare England in this respect with continental countries, where the intellectual and artistic life is directly encouraged by the State, and where a special ministerial department bears the responsibility of the artistic and literary development of the nation. London possesses no national theatre for classic

repertory similar to the Comédie Française, because neither the State nor the London County Council are yet in a position to subsidise such an enterprise. It does not possess a permanent opera, for the excellent reason that no important operatic enterprise could live anywhere in Europe if it were not supported by public funds. The same applies to concerts and art exhibitions, for the slight privileges enjoyed by the Royal Academy can scarcely be considered as an exception. When the outsider begins to realise the difficulties with which managers, conductors, and all kinds of artists are faced in England, he no longer wonders why the standard is not quite as good as in other countries, but he wonders instead how it can be as good as it is, and asks himself, not without a pang of anxiety, what would happen in his own country if State, provinces and communes ceased to interest themselves in the artistic life of the nation, and if the unfortunate painters, writers and musicians had to depend entirely on the support of the public and of a few wealthy enthusiasts.

It has been understood in England, for a long time past, that the government of the country should leave higher education, works of charity and relief, to the generosity of the moneyed classes. Such things are supposed not to fall within the scope

of State's activity and to be better left alone. In this case, however, the doctrine of non-interference has been fully justified by experience. There is a certain disinterested spirit in English schools, universities, hospitals and charitable institutions which only private enthusiasm can possibly develop. Even if the State increases its control in the future, this spirit will remain an inspiring influence and will succeed, as it has already done in certain cases, in softening the stiffness of officialdom.

English individualism has its constructive as well as its destructive aspect. It has allowed the development of the slums, but it has also undertaken the moral and physical cure of the slum dwellers. It prevents the State from supporting art and literature, but it intervenes again and again in promoting remarkable artistic and theatrical enterprises and has stored the London museums with invaluable treasures.

Individual liberty might, in other countries, lead to a wild scramble of conflicting interests if it were not balanced by a strong and active government. But English freedom is somewhat different. It is not so much the right which all citizens have to do certain things, as the right which they claim " to do the things which they ought to do and to leave undone the things which they ought not to do "—in

other words, to follow their own conscience. That is why foreign critics writing on England, dwell in one chapter on English individualism, and in another on the English herd instinct. The contradiction is only apparent, for what the Englishman demands above everything else is the right to perform his duty (as he understands it) to the community. This idea is so deeply rooted in his soul that, when he wants something very badly for himself, he usually succeeds in believing that he wants it for his country or, better still, for the good of mankind. This is yet another instance in which the old accusation of hypocrisy has been launched against England, as if any attempt, however weak, towards righteousness were not infinitely preferable to blatant cynicism. Voltaire's saying here takes on a new and unexpected meaning: English hypocrisy is indeed a homage which English vice pays to English virtue, for public opinion is strong enough in England to crush vice if it does not appear under a false disguise; that it should be compelled to do so is a fact of which every Englishman has the right to be proud.

There is no European country where business and generosity are more closely combined than in England. Not that it is always advisable, for instance, to try to obtain easier terms from the head of a firm who is well-known for his open-handedness.

As his firm's representative, he is likely to remain unflinching, although, as a private individual, he may seem to be quite a different man. His shy generosity frequently shelters itself behind an appearance of egoism. Like Meagles, he often pretends that he does good because he is practical, but whatever happens the two accounts must remain strictly separate, and he would lose all self-respect if he reduced his terms in favour of a needy customer instead of making him pay full price and handing him the difference afterwards, as if some change were due to him.

Shortly after the outbreak of the War, one of the allied nations found itself in great need of transport, but, owing to the shortage of shipping, the conditions made by English shipowners were very severe. A friend of mine was sent to London to try to obtain better terms from a certain owner whose name I have completely forgotten, which frees me from scruple in telling the story. I succeeded in getting into touch with an acquaintance of this gentleman, and found out that he had generously contributed to various war relief funds. I informed my friend of the fact, telling him that a man who could show such generosity on the one hand was not likely to prove exacting on the other. Cheered by this news, my friend started on his errand, promising to report

results. The latter were disappointing. The shipowner recognised that his terms were high for normal times, but he added that these were not normal times and that he felt entitled to make whatever reasonable profits circumstances allowed. Yes, he *had* subscribed to relief funds, but what the deuce had that to do with the price of ships? The suggested concession would be unfair to his other clients, and besides he was not in the habit of mixing charity with business.

Now, on the continent, the knowledge that the man was sympathetic to those who approached him might have proved invaluable, but I actually believe that my friend would have stood a better chance if I had not taken so much trouble to help him. The allusion to the relief funds did far more harm than good, for on no account was sentiment to influence business. These two sides of a gentleman's activity must remain separate, in two water-tight compartments, or like two ledgers in different drawers. In more senses than one, must the left hand ignore what the right hand is doing, and, in these days especially, the right hand is often doing far more than the left would like it to do. There is, on the one side, a decrease in income and a heavy increase in taxation, and, on the other, a long list of subscriptions which are considered almost as debts of

honour. No wonder that the lives of the so-called wealthy are no longer what they were.

It would be interesting to find out how Arbuthnot's caricature of a certain kind of Englishman in the early eighteenth century came finally to be adopted as a national type. I suppose that the creator of John Bull haunted the same aristocratic circles as Swift and Pope and thought it a clever thing to jibe at the gruff, contentious English bourgeois of his time. But John Bull is nevertheless as unfit to represent the average Englishman as Marianne or Fritz to impersonate the French or German spirit. He is mentally and physically wrong. Every Englishman is as anxious to hide his pugnacity as his threatening rotundity. He knows, better than any other European, the art of remaining cool in the most heated discussion and the means of reducing his weight when sedentary life and age threaten to oblige him to let out his belt.

It is curious to note that this eighteenth century legend of the fat middle-class man was maintained as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century. Dickens' Pickwick is as mellow in character as Arbuthnot's John Bull was abrupt, but he looks remarkably like him. As a matter of fact, Pickwick's character might well be chosen as that of the typical Englishman, after his retirement from business.

Pickwick is certainly an adventurer and a bit of a Don Quixote. We are not, unfortunately, aware of the activity of his left hand, but his right hand seems always to have been open. Pickwick was full of the zest of life, fond of the past and fonder still of the present. He was essentially sociable and so public-spirited that he preferred to go to prison rather than submit to the abuses of his time. Like the typical Englishman of comedy, he begins as a joke, but, when the "play is done" and the lights are out, he has become a hero.

CHAPTER VI

GENTILLESSE

I COULD not say exactly when I began to feel comfortable in this country, but it certainly took me two or three years to accept the irreconcilable and to recognise that any attempt to apply to England and English affairs the standards and methods of thought of continental nations was doomed to failure. The fog could not be dispelled by the artificial glare of searchlights. I felt that I must remain impassive before the most baffling problems and allow the sun gradually to pierce through the clouds. It was useless to try and obtain a clear vision of a land which had no clear vision to offer, and to try and understand people in a way in which they did not care to understand themselves. I began to realise the error which has until recent years misled so many foreign critics of the "unknown island." They thought that they could write about England as they would write about France, Germany, Italy, Spain, or any other country which has shared the life of Europe during the past centuries. They

imagined that, whatever the differences existing between England and their own country, such differences would be essentially similar to those existing between the latter and its other neighbours. They did not take into account the vagaries of the English character, and the capricious peculiarities of the English temperament, which are for ever at work crossing and recrossing the rigid limits dividing the past from the present, the reasonable right from the reasonable wrong, the claims of democracy from the privileges of aristocracy, the liberty of the citizen from the authority of the State, the dogma accepted by the Church from the religious inspiration of the individual.

The same mist which prevented an English revolution in the eighteenth century and maintained landlordism up to the present day, has favoured the development of a special social type which is universally recognised as peculiarly English.

One of the best descriptions of this type is given by George Santayana, in his *Soliloquies in England*:

"The low pressure at which their minds seemed to work showed how little they were alarmed about anything; things would all be managed somehow. . . . Their aspect, their habits, their invincible likes and dislikes, seemed like an anchor to me in the currents of this turbid age. They were a gift

of the gods, like the sunshine, or the fresh air, or the memory of the Greeks; they were superior beings, and yet more animal than the rest of us, calmer, with a different scale of consciousness and a slower pace of thought."

Before experiencing that sense of comfort, however, a sensitive foreigner will undergo a severe trial. When one has been accustomed for years to recognise no superiority but that of the intelligence, there is nothing so exasperating as to feel a sense of inferiority before a man whose intellectual powers do not appear exceptional.

Moral education, which has hitherto been the basis of English training, is left to home influence abroad and takes no active part in school life. The same applies, to a great extent, to sport. However brilliant a young Frenchman or German may be, he is therefore unable, when he comes to this country, to draw upon those reserves of will-power and energy which combine to make the Englishman a model of restraint and self-reliance. These "semi-divine animals," to use Professor Santayana's expression, cannot be easily drawn out. They are, on first acquaintance, extraordinarily non-committal and inarticulate. The keenest questions are calmly set aside by them with a few words grudgingly spoken and often mumbled as if to challenge the ear

of the listener. The few remarks which can be painfully extracted from them would appear commonplace if they did not emanate from such superior beings, and the newcomer, accustomed to value everything according to the intellectual standard of his continental precocity, will naturally be tempted to challenge this superiority. If he attempts to do so, his sense of grievance will be still further increased by the aloofness of the attitude which his interlocutor will immediately assume. Any other European, placed in the same situation, might show pain or even anger; but the Englishman remains serene as an Olympian god, as little concerned with what others may think of him as such a god would be with the vain agitations of mankind. He is the worst propagandist on the surface of this earth, for, though he would never say so, he makes it sufficiently plain that he does not care a straw whether you like him or not, and that he is not going to take the trouble to explain any riddle concerning him which you cannot solve yourself: "I am what I am; take me or leave me, and be d—d to you!"

There is, at the basis of this English type, a colossal foundation of stolid pride and self-consciousness. Why should one trouble to justify oneself against false accusations? Why should one trouble to express feelings which any decent being

must experience in certain circumstances, and which are all the more sacred and holy for remaining silent? Why should one make a show of oneself in public, and profane the most intimate emotions by outward manifestations which cannot affect the inner soul?

I remember my astonishment when I happened to witness at my club the first encounter of two devoted brothers after many years of separation. One of them knew me well enough to admit that this return of his younger brother would entirely alter his life, and that he had been looking forward to it for months, always fearing that some unexpected obstacle might interfere. I was the only member in the hall when the meeting took place, and instinctively turned my back upon it and made for the smoking room. This precaution was quite useless, for the only words which reached me were: "Hallo, old man! All right?" "All right, thanks." "Come and hang up your coat. You know the place."

Of course I imagined the gleam in my friend's eyes and the warmth of the handshake, but I had to imagine a good deal to make up for such a trivial expression of brotherly affection.

Public sentiment is just as reticent as private feeling. When, in November, 1929, the Prince of Wales presided at a dinner given to over three

hundred holders of the Victoria Cross, he frankly recognised his embarrassment at having to mention anything so unmentionable as patriotic heroism :

" I feel probably as uncomfortable as you do." he declared, " because it is not our national habit to invite men to dinner in order to tell them how brave they are." And he went on to suggest that most of them would very likely contend that they had merely won the V.C. " from motives of self-preservation, or because they happened to notice that someone on the Staff was watching and admiring them." This speech provoked a great deal of laughter and applause, which showed that the V.C.'s understood the Prince as well as he understood them. It is almost certain that, had the same remarks been made, on a similar occasion, by a foreign Prince to his own war-heroes, they would have met with a very different reception.

Many years ago, the Folkestone-Boulogne mail-boat caught fire and was in danger of sinking. As a crowd of women on deck were becoming alarmed, a young sailor blandly reassured them, saying : " You are quite safe, ladies—you are with English sailors." There is an ingrained conviction in the race that, if the English have not got the monopoly of courage, they alone possess the secret of playing the game exactly as it should be played ; never wincing when

they are hurt, never looking pleased when they are winning, or displeased when they are losing, never questioning the decision of the umpire, never, above all, hesitating to shake hands with the enemy the moment he is beaten.

This pride, this self-mastery and self-respect entirely dominate the thoughts and actions of the typical Englishman, as he at first appears to foreign observers. It is beneath him to show unrestrained curiosity about outside matters, to indulge in any exuberant manifestations of joy or sorrow, to boast of his noble deeds and to repent openly of his evil deeds. He must observe a material and moral etiquette. His soul must be as clean as his hands. His honour must be unstained. He must, above all, play fair and show his mettle. Insincerity is to be shunned, not so much because it is sinful as because it is mean and despicable. There is a tradition of generosity, open-handedness and courtesy to be observed. The strong extend their protection to the weak, to women, children, the poor, the sick, and all kinds of animals, especially the horse and the dog, companions of the noblest forms of sport.

During the first year I spent in this country, I struggled very hard with this conventional conception of the Englishman, because it did not appear

to me essentially English. It only seemed essentially aristocratic. I contended that the difference existing between the average foreigner and the accepted type of Englishman was very much the same as the difference between an average Parisian shopkeeper and some aristocrat of the Faubourg Saint-Germain; or, in other words, that the description given above applied equally well to the noble families of any nation. A nobleman, whether he is French, German, Italian, Spanish, or English, will always dazzle the mere bourgeois with his self-confidence, his aloofness, his parsimony of words and gestures, his reluctance to give vent to any intimate feeling, and his at least apparent sincerity, generosity and courtesy. He will be gallant, in the English meaning of the word, in the field of battle, and " galant," in the French meaning of the word, in the drawing-room. He too loves dogs and horses, and seizes every opportunity to show his skill in hunting or shooting. He has the same care for his clothes, and would rather make a poor meal off fine china than a good one off coarse crockery.

I also noticed, while wandering through the country, that the conventional type of Englishman was rather the exception than the rule. I met far more people looking and behaving like the characters of Dickens than like those of Thackeray, and the

number of ordinary people seemed to me to outweigh that of the favoured few, who, for some unaccountable reason, had forced themselves on the attention of foreign critics. I saw a crowd of costers on their way to the Derby, and witnessed some gaudy funerals in the east end of London; I spent evenings in the gallery at the Lyceum, at the time when that theatre was still the recognised home of melodrama, and attended services in the churches of the very poor; and I came back with the strong impression that, if a good many thousand English gentlemen really behaved according to plan, millions of English people by no means did so, and displayed the same exuberance, sentimentality, pathetic weakness, love of gossip, sociability, and touching humility which characterise the poor and the lower middle classes all over the world.

It was, however, impossible to wave aside an opinion so generally agreed upon by the best critics. Besides, I had still to explain why such a large number of the English bourgeois had successfully adopted the manner and habits of the nobility, and why I could not find in this country the same strong class characteristics which I found abroad. On the continent it is nearly always possible to distinguish a rich bourgeois—whether merchant or industrial —from a nobleman. The bourgeois has his own

traditions and is not ashamed of them. He may be highly intellectual and refined and be received into the most exclusive circles, but he still remains frankly and openly a son of the middle class. There are a hundred details by which he can be recognised as such: from the way he wears his hat to the way he hails a friend. There is a certain joviality in his manner, a certain bluntness of speech, which would betray him at once if he attempted for one moment to disguise himself. But the point is that he does not attempt to disguise himself. There is an abruptness in his manners which is self-assertive. The French call it "rondeur," and the word is full of suggestion, for the round, easy-going bourgeois may well be opposed to the thin, elegant aristocrat.

The bourgeois too has his pedigree. I remember my grandmother talking to me with the greatest pride of her own grandfather, the founder of what she still called, in her blessed ignorance, the prosperity of the family. He was called Jean Noël Bouvier, and tended his father's flocks in a Brabançon village at about the time of the French Revolution. One day, the curé, passing through the churchyard, found him engaged in trying to decipher the inscriptions engraved on a tombstone. On hearing from the boy that he wished to learn to read, he

offered to give him lessons, and recommended him, later on, to the notary of the neighbouring town, who engaged him as a clerk, and whom he eventually succeeded. And the dear lady added: "What an example! We must all be worthy of Jean Noël."

The working man abroad is distinct from the bourgeois, just as the bourgeois is distinct from the aristocrat. Here again, manners differ and no effort is made to disguise these differences. The old-fashioned working clothes, which used to be as characteristic as any uniform, are unfortunately gradually disappearing; but the old corporate spirit is still strong enough to link together people of the same trade and give them a certain pride in their common traditions. Here, too, there is a certain self-assertive class consciousness, and the feeling that it is as fine a thing to be a butcher, a baker, or a candlestick-maker as to hold the loftiest position in the State.

Just as the bourgeois is keen to show his pride in his own class, in spite of a lingering desire to mix with the nobility, so the working-man is fond of talking of his trade and of showing his toil-hardened hands, in spite of a secret ambition to secure a softer employment, if not for himself, at least for his son. There is a kind of defiance in this attitude which

does not necessarily imply class-hatred, but which is based on the strong belief that any luxury can only be acquired by unfair means.

It would, for instance, be considered tactless abroad for a lady in sympathy with the labour movement to attend public meetings dressed in any but the simplest clothes. I remember the surprise of an Englishwoman I knew, who found herself scowled at by a hostile crowd in Brussels, because she had donned for such an occasion a rather conspicuous and picturesque hat. "They don't seem to like it," she remarked. "I put on my best hat to do them honour. English people would certainly have appreciated it." She was perfectly right, because class-consciousness has never been so strong here as abroad, and because there are few places in this country where a true lady beautifully dressed would not be made welcome. For in England the aristocratic type has such a fascination for the imagination of the masses, that all other class characteristics are blurred. As soon as he succeeds in freeing himself from the shackles of want and care, every Englishman wishes to become a gentleman. He does not always succeed, even after receiving a title, but he always strives to do so. Instead of having three or four classes like other countries, England possesses the whole gamut of

social varieties, from the perfect gentleman at the top of the ladder to the outcast at the bottom.

There are, of course, far more gentlemen and ladies in England than there are aristocrats abroad, because the English aristocracy and landed gentry have annexed a large proportion of the moneyed classes, the professional classes, and the intelligentsia. But, outside the magic circle, there is no order discernible among the crowd of would-be gentlemen and ladies, who are making desperate efforts to raise themselves from rung to rung. Progress is by no means easy, for many are called but few are chosen, and the distance between the bottom and the top of the ladder is perhaps greater in this country than anywhere else. If we except the peasantry, few English working-men have preserved that easy swing of gait and inborn elegance so noticeable among Italian navvies, for instance, or the natural distinction of speech of certain French workmen. The accent is perhaps the greatest of all obstacles on the road to English " gentility."

In his book *England*, Wilhelm Dibelius observes how the standards of the aristocracy have, during the last centuries, " percolated down into the lower orders," and how, on the other hand, an ever larger number of new peers has swelled the ranks of the upper classes, buttressing the prestige of birth with

the power of money. He explains how the ennobled bourgeois has eagerly adopted the attitude of mind and the manners of the aristocrat, while the latter, especially during the Victorian age, was himself obliged to accept the bourgeois notions of business probity and sex purity. The paragon gentleman learnt to pay his debts as well as to be open-handed, and to appear the flower of courtesy while remaining faithful to his wife.

It should, however, be made clear that this conventional type is only indirectly the product of the English spirit. During the middle ages or even the Elizabethan days, continental writers were not particularly struck by the aristocratic character of the English nation. The modern distinction is the outcome of historical development rather than of racial temperament. If we are to discover its source, it is to English " mistiness " and political tolerance that we must again turn our attention. We must remember the lesson of the ivy and the hedges ; we must not forget that the modern social revolution—if revolution it can be called—did not come in England from the violent breaking of their fetters by the people, as exemplified by the storming of the Bastille, but from a compromise between the privileged few who bowed to the necessity of opening their ranks to a large number of newcomers

and of extending their privileges to an ever-increasing proportion of the people—and the so-called lower classes who, though eager to claim their rights, were equally prepared to adopt the standard of life and responsibilities of the aristocracy.

It is perhaps unfair to talk of snobbishness in connection with an attitude of mind which has produced such splendid results; but there is no doubt that, if England can be called a country of gentlemen, she can also be called a country of snobs. Even Dickens, who was so strongly biassed against aristocrats, could not help emphasising the snobbishness of his bourgeois. Does not the good and generous Meagles secretly rejoice at seeing his daughter connected with the Tite-Barnacles? Does not Mrs. Boffin, after rising in the world, furnish half her parlour in pretentious style, while Mr. Boffin, faithful to his origin, entrenches himself on the sanded floor of the other half of the room?

The same attitude is conspicuous even among the type of persons so well depicted by George Belcher, who insist on speaking of the "lady who obliges" by cleaning the steps or doing the washing.

At the outbreak of the war, a large number of young men who had just left public schools or

entered universities, preferred to volunteer as privates rather than wait for a commission. Most of them had the greatest difficulty in persuading their companions to treat them as equals. They would insist on "sir-ing" them and on doing for them certain jobs which they considered unsuitable for gentlemen. It soon became apparent that the soldiers preferred to follow the rawest "gent" than the most experienced subaltern risen from the ranks. Rightly or wrongly, they believed that he understood his responsibilities better, whether in leading an attack, looking after their comfort, or—most important of all—dealing out the rum rations. When an urgent call was made for more officers, many of these early volunteers were compelled to realise that they would serve their country better by applying for commissions. This respect for refinement and education seems to derive from the bond of loyalty existing between tenant and squire. It is intimately connected with the preservation of landlordism and with the fact that the sweeping changes which upset social values throughout Europe, after the French Revolution, did not affect England to the same extent as other countries. English politicians are fond of talking of democratic principles, but, from an outsider's point of view, England appears far more as an

enlarged aristocracy than as the classical land of equal citizenship.[1]

This broadening of the upper classes during the last two centuries could never have been achieved without the help of the great public schools and the old universities. Without taking sides in the discussion of this subject which has come so much to the fore in recent years, it may be said that these schools and colleges have played a far larger part in English life than any prominent educational institution has done in the life of other countries. Whatever criticism may be made against them from the point of view of scientific and literary instruction, they have succeeded in preserving and developing a certain type of character and a certain ideal of service, without which England would never have become what she is today. Apart from religious schools, which only influence a minority, secondary and higher education abroad is confined to the intellectual training of the student. After obtaining his degree, the latter will become an efficient lawyer, doctor or engineer, but he will only be a gentleman if he has been lucky enough to be born into a refined family. Such a method of education would have proved disastrous in a country in which the

[1] Compare, for instance, the most violent attacks on modern English landlords with the sweeping statements of La Bruyère on the French aristocracy of the seventeenth century.

aristocracy has remained the most influential power in the State, and in which the ranks of this upper class have to be reinforced with new recruits every year. It has been contended that, whatever their avocation, students might prove more efficient in later years if less attention and time were to be devoted to their moral training, and that it is better for a patient to have a clever doctor who is not a gentleman than a gentleman who is not a clever doctor. But this kind of criticism does not take into account the most urgent need of the whole nation. Having avoided, for better or for worse, the revolutionary turmoils of modern times, England depends on her gentlemen today as much as she depended upon them in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It may be better for the individual to be attended by the clever ungentlemanly doctor, but it would certainly be much worse for the nation if the vast majority of the people belonging to the professional classes were not gentlemen.

There is a remarkable similarity between the rules of the medieval order of chivalry and the code of honour which an English boy of seven is urged to follow, as much by his older schoolfellows as by his masters. There is not, perhaps, the same insistence on his obligations towards the Church, and he is not bound to wage relentless war against the infidels.

But he will have to be truthful and to keep his word. He must be generous. He must never retreat before the enemy. He must love his country. He must respect the weak and defend the oppressed, and fulfil his duties, if not towards his feudal lord at least towards his school. Football and cricket have taken the place of skirmishes and tournaments, but the two codes are essentially the same. This is the foundation on which the boy's character is built, and it lies so deep that, even if in later years faith deteriorates and sense of duty weakens, honour generally manages to survive, just as it survived among the decadent aristocracy of the eighteenth century.

The most hardened and cynical clubman will still repeat with Somerset, revolted by the intrigues of the anarchist Zero: "There is no question as to fact. Right and wrong are but figments, and the shadow of a word; but for all that there are certain things that I cannot do, and there are certain others that I will not stand."[1]

The gentleman has been criticised a good deal of late years, and some prophets are already predicting that he will soon disappear together with public schools, established church and country houses. There is no denying the fact that England

[1] R. L. Stevenson: *The Dynamiter*.

is no longer today what she was thirty years ago, and that she will very likely not be, in another thirty years, what she is today. Many large estates are being sold to post-war millionaires and benevolent institutions, and the rush for education is such that the old schools and colleges are in danger of being swamped by less expensive secondary schools and modern universities subsidised by public funds.

Manners too have changed. The old courtesy is less noticeable than it was, and the great power wielded by uneducated money magnates has exerted a disastrous influence on society life.

If the existence of the gentleman depended only on birth or wealth, it might be considered to be severely threatened by the present crisis. But it depends really first of all on gentleness, or rather on the old virtue of "gentillesse" praised by Dante, Jean de Meun and Chaucer, and earlier than these by Boethius. All these agree that "gentillesse"—that is to say this excellent association of courage and kindness, fortitude and courtesy—is a divine gift entirely independent of social conditions, and which is acquired, not inherited.

> Noblece vient de bon courage,
> Car gentillece de lignage
> N'est pas gentillece qui vaille,
> Porquoi bonté de cuer i faille. . . .[1]

[1] *Roman de la Rose.*

Chaucer is even more definite in insisting that "gentillesse" is accessible to all:

> But for ye speken of swich gentillesse
> As is descended out of old richesse,
> That therfore sholden ye be gentilmen,
> Swich arrogance is not worth an hen.
> Loke who that is most vertuous alway,
> Privee and apert, and most entendeth ay
> To do the gentil dedes that he can,
> And take him for the grettest gentilman.
> Crist wol, we claym of him our gentillesse,
> Not of our elders for hir old richesse.

In so far as this warning was obeyed, aristocracy prospered and "gentillesse" remained the social code of the country. In so far as it was ignored, the prestige of the privileged classes was shaken and ultimately ruined. The degeneracy of the Bourbons, the corruption of the French nobility who abandoned their country seats to the tender mercies of stewards so that they might be free to seek the pleasures and share in the intrigues of court life, provoked the rational upheaval which substituted the bourgeoisie to the aristocracy in France. In England, on the contrary, the early dismissal of the Stuarts and the coming into power of a dynasty which could not afford to ignore the claims of public opinion, favoured the natural trend of "mistiness" and the merging of old nobility into modern gentility. Most English noblemen and squires,

instead of flocking to London in the last two centuries, remained attached to the land and preserved a keen sense of their responsibilities towards their tenants. Many of them were self-opinionated, like Squire Western, but many others were indulgent and open-handed, like Mr. Allworthy.

There is a great deal to be said for the " fine old gentleman " who, according to the song,

> had an old estate,
> And kept up his old mansion
> At a bountiful old rate;
> With a good old porter to relieve
> The old poor at his gate.

He and his kind are perhaps the only aristocrats who have ever become popular, because they accepted the duties as well as the advantages of their exalted position. Even if the consideration which the squire enjoyed were tainted with some snobbishness, it was to a large extent justified by the active and personal interest which he took in the welfare of his retainers. Landlordism may have been at the root of England's agricultural crisis, but, on the other hand, it has endowed the Englishman with a certain dignity and gentleness which is the secret of his prestige abroad.

Among the concert of European nations, England

is today the principal representative of certain medieval qualities which belong essentially to Western-European civilisation. She seems predestined to preserve these qualities throughout a period when they appear particularly out-of-date, and to hand them down to a new Europe which, having recovered from a temporary fever of utilitarianism, may once again realise their inestimable value. Such a feat would be nothing short of miraculous, but it would certainly not be more amazing than the one England succeeded in achieving during the last century, when she flooded the world with a brand-new medievalism immediately after the industrial revolution, and when, through the prophetic voices of Carlyle and Ruskin, she became the champion of Faith and Handicrafts in an age of Science and Factories. The English mist will make any dream come true.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOBBY-HORSE

APART from the general characteristics which I have endeavoured to describe in the foregoing chapters, the English at work do not differ appreciably from other Europeans. The English professional man, business man, peasant or employee shares the interests of foreigners engaged in similar occupations. He naturally wishes to get on in the world and to make the best reputation possible and as much money as he can in the shortest time. In spite of the bold assertions of certain critics, the get-rich-quick gospel is by no means an English monopoly, and the attitude of mind it fosters is much the same in every country. A few "characters" may be found abroad who rebel against the dictates of material interests and prefer a poorer and freer life to the shackles of prosperity, but such characters can be found everywhere and are not a peculiarly continental product. I was therefore, at an early date, induced to abandon the study of the Englishman at work and to concentrate my attention on the Englishman at play.

This led to far more important results, and, first of all, to the discovery of the Hobby-Horse. Odell Shepard tells us[1] that this variety of horse can only be found in Great Britain, owing to the peculiarly luscious quality of English pastures constantly watered by English rain. He might have added, by English mist, for mist favours the development of hobbies just as it favours that of all essentially English things. The hobby-horse is in fact an irrational animal. His French counterpart, the "dada", is recognised as the usual mount of children or monomaniacs. A very young boy may imagine a stick to be a sufficient substitute for a whole body, a tail and four legs, but no sensible French adult will share this illusion. To translate "enfourcher son dada" by "to indulge in one's hobby" is to misunderstand the genius of the two languages and the two peoples. No sensible Englishman could be ashamed to acknowledge his interest in a subject or occupation foreign to the usual course of his activity. The possession of a hobby is to any normal person almost as important as that of a bathroom. Whether it be sport, games or collecting, it belongs to the ordinary business of life and can only be sacrificed under the stress of the most urgent necessity. You can no more imagine a

[1] *The Art of Forgetting.*

gentleman without his hobby than a knight without his horse; the hobby may, in fact, be considered to be the modern mount of the modern "chevalier." It fills the life of the leisured classes in twentieth century England, just as hunting and tournaments filled the life of the barons of old. Englishmen, it is true, no longer hunt the boar, but they still hunt the fox with such fervour that their whole existence may be wrapped up in this exclusive interest.

It is somewhat startling for a continental writer to read the story of an intelligent man who, after leaving school, finds nothing better to do than devote his whole life to hunting in the winter and cricket in the summer. As far as I remember, there is not a word about art or literature in the *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, though Siegfried Sassoon's book is evidently based on his own personal memories. The young man's hero was not a great writer or a great statesman, but Denis Milden, Master of the Hunt. When asked to spend a night with him, the boy feels as excited as a debutante before her first Court, and he comments upon the tact with which Milden deals with his correspondence with the neighbouring farmers as a Prime Minister's secretary might boast of the wonderful qualities of his chief.

When another English writer, Horace Annesley Vachell, published a book entitled *The Best of*

England, I hastened to read it in the hope that it would give me a complete picture of English life, and the confirmation of some of my own conclusions. I was therefore somewhat surprised to find a series of essays on hunting, shooting, angling, cricket, football, food, and many other weighty matters—but never a word of trade, science, or literature. The "best of England" was apparently a stable full of English-hobby-horses.

One of the reasons why current conversation is not so interesting in England as abroad is that English people are forbidden to talk shop. As this rule is not nearly so strict on the continent, people of various professions may obtain a great deal of useful information from those whom they happen to meet and who are only too delighted to show off their knowledge of the subject with which they are acquainted. Not being allowed to talk business, law or medicine, the English gentleman is compelled to talk golf, fishing or cricket, and is forthwith accused of being a dull dog by the very people—generally the ladies—who forbid him to shine in his own sphere.

For it is not only the leisured classes which are affected by this spirit. The hardest-working people show the same eagerness and enthusiasm and snatch any possible moment from their regular work to

refresh themselves, as they call it, by some of these fantastic and useless occupations. It is an aristocratic trait which, like so many other things, has spread from the nobility to the bourgeoisie and to the whole people.

There is, after all, some sense in the popular conception of the Englishman abroad who is always hitting a ball, picking up stones among ruins, or buying faked curios in a shop. Such things are done all over the world by all kinds of people, but the English seem to specialise in them. Whist, bridge, cycling, tennis, football, golf, racing, have spread from England to the rest of the world, pouring into foreign languages hundreds of technical terms. Many collecting manias must also have originated in this country, which remains, with America, the best market for such articles as rare stamps, autographs and historical souvenirs of no practical or æsthetic value.

We speak abroad of rest, implying such mild relaxation as a walk, a drive and an occasional game of cards in the café, to while away the time between two drinks. When the English mention rest, they nearly always mean long tramps, vigorous golf or strenuous tennis. Imagine a scrum as a resting-place and you may obtain some idea of the contrast. The Englishman's rest is often much harder than his

work. I never find my friends so tired as on Saturday evenings.

All this is essentially childlike. Watch the eagerness with which a boy leaves his books for his ball or cycle, his need for movement, his craving for running out-of-doors whenever the weather is favourable. Watch too, his love for games, his worship of the fickle goddess Fortune, his greed for counters, his collecting manias, the way in which he stuffs his pockets with buttons, Christmas cards, faded flowers, conkers, odd stones and coloured pencils.

Every boy, left to his own devices, would naturally take violent exercise or gamble his small fortune away. He needs a great deal of movement and strong emotions. He is a born courtier of Chance, because his imagination is sufficiently vivid to react at once against the stern teaching of experience. A few losses may teach a man the dangers of gambling. It takes at least a hundred to crush a boy's belief in his own star, and the sooner he suffers them the better for him. Like all young living things, he has a blind predatory and acquisitive instinct which prompts him to catch hold of everything that strikes his fancy and to hide it away. Here again, being without experience, he cannot distinguish between useful and useless objects.

Stamp and autograph collecting must be the survivals of this early stage of development. These various tendencies are common to children all over the world, but England is the only country where they are shared to such an extent by the younger and the older generations. There is something English in every boy, whatever his race or nationality.

I once ran across two friends of mine, an old and distinguished member of the Diplomatic Service, and his son, the Vicar of one of the most important parishes in the country, who were spending a short holiday in town. As they appeared to be in very good spirits, I asked them how they had employed their time. The father explained that he had called on his doctor in Harley Street, and the son added that as they came back through Baker Street, it had occurred to them to enter Madame Tussaud's. "Yes," said the father with a smile, "we enjoyed that immensely. I hadn't been there for sixty-five years. It is all new now, of course, and very good, but it seems to me that the old Chamber of Horrors was better. Don't you think so, William?"

The Vicar agreed and, as they went on discussing the individual merits of some of the most famous waxworks, I could not help laughing at their eagerness. They both turned to me with questioning glances, and asked the reason for my mirth.

"Well," I replied, "look at it in this way. Here you are, two men belonging to the most intelligent class of Englishmen, having a wide knowledge of your respective professions and a taste for art and literature and the drama. Doesn't it seem strange that, being together in town and having an hour to spend, you could find nothing better to do than to visit Madame Tussaud's?"

At that moment we were interrupted. I wish I had had time to explain my meaning better and to tell them that they did not enjoy their visit to the waxworks on account of its interest, but merely on account of the memories it was able to revive. My old friend did not see Shakespeare and Napoleon with his eyes of today, but with his eyes of sixty-five years ago. If the present Chamber of Horrors was not quite so good as the old one, it was because, in this particular case, a link had been broken between the Present and the Past.

I have often been struck by the pleasure which fathers and mothers seem to take in shepherding their children about the Zoo, bringing them to the pantomime, reading their books and playing with their toys. This pleasure is not entirely unselfish. It is founded on numberless comparisons and associations. The English have long memories. The "good time" they give to their family reminds

them of "the good time" they had themselves in the "old days."

This unwillingness to grow old is an essential feature of the English folk lore of the twentieth century. When the learned scientists of the future endeavour to trace the origin of the Peter Pan myth, as no doubt they will, they will be obliged to recognise that it is peculiar to this island. Every continental Tom Thumb is a kind of dwarf, a quaint being which retains the body of a child, while possessing the intelligence of a man, but Peter is neither a monster nor a precocious imp, he is merely the Eternal Babe which every Englishman carries in his breast.

Its creation was a piece of impertinent indiscretion which would never have been tolerated in the last century. No wonder the managers fought shy of the play when it first was offered them. No wonder some clubmen shrugged their shoulders at first and scoffed at what they called "Barrie's sloppy sentimentalism." These gentlemen were the last defenders of Victorian shame and reticence. They wished to keep the cat in the bag.

For a hundred years, the English had endeavoured to behave themselves and to give the world an example of deportment. They remained imperturbable under the most painful and ludicrous

circumstances; they avoided any gesture, keeping their hands in their pockets or attached to the lapels of their coats; they never raised their voices, mumbling praise or scorn with the same muffled diction; they looked bored and stiff when they took the keenest interest in life and seemed hard and indifferent when their hearts were jumping in their throats. All their social training, all their personal effort aimed at appearing older and graver than they were.

By letting Peter loose, Barrie tore the masks from their faces. The capers cut by the Eternal Babe, his rippling laughter, his unashamed delight in nature, his candid belief in fairies, his jokes and pranks revealed a state of things of which the stern Victorians never dreamed. If the great god Pan himself had appeared in the midst of London and blown his pipes on the grand organ of Westminster Abbey, the revolution could not have been more startling.

The change brought about by Peter in English ways and fashions was nevertheless accepted with equanimity by the great majority. They allowed him to enter their lives, with an indulgent smile for "Barrie's whimsical genius." While they were busily denouncing Wells' "cynicism," Chesterton's "paradoxes" and Shaw's "insincerity" and defending the fort in which their privileges and prejudices

were strongly entrenched, they did not notice Peter slipping in through a secret passage, taking them unawares, and planting his own flag on their highest tower.

The critics and satirists appeared boldly in the open and fought their battles clad in a strong armour of wit, humour or sarcasm, but this naked infant, which old Solomon the Raven might have pushed from his perch, eluded all opposition and conquered without striking a blow.

Wells' personality is too elusive to be visualised, but I can very well imagine Shaw wielding Don Quixote's lance and Chesterton astride Sancho's donkey. Like Don Quixote, Shaw has always fought dreams and illusions—only they are not in his brain, but in other people's—at least, so he thinks; like Sancho, Chesterton has always propounded common sense views and preferred to call a mill a mill rather than a giant, and a sin a sin rather than a virtue in disguise, when he has happened to meet one. Both this aggressive Sancho and this clear-eyed Quixote have attacked the Victorian Castle, one from the North, with the cold wind of his sarcasm, the other from the South, with the warm breath of his Christianity. "Look ahead," shouts Shaw, "we shall only be fit to live in the thirtieth century." "Look backwards," booms Chesterton, "we

shall only be redeemed in the Middle Ages." "Give up your romance and drop your cant," shrieks the one. "Strengthen your traditions, build them upon the rock of faith," echoes the other. Meanwhile Peter, looking down from the topmost battlements, whispers softly: "Don't worry, good people! I shall be with you tomorrow, as I was with you yesterday."

I am not going to suggest that England and Toyland are one and the same country and the only place in the world where the Christmas spirit is properly appreciated. But there is a certain sense of exhilaration and irresponsibility which, from time to time, carries the English back to the jolly days of Merrie England, as if two centuries of Puritan education had made no impression on them. When this sacred fever seizes them, they may rival even the Flemings, who dance their merry way through the kermesses of Breughel, Teniers and contemporary Belgium. They are even able to add a touch of crazy incongruity which is essentially their own.

I had often wondered why so many pedlars sold their wares in the neighbourhood of the Stock Exchange. Did they rely on the solicitude of fond parents anxious to bring a toy home after some

profitable speculation, or had it anything to do, perchance, with bulls and bears? The solution was far more direct and surprising. It came to me when I heard from a friend that he had been watching with some of his colleagues the evolutions of some mechanical toys that had been set going on the "floor" by a humorous member of the company.

When, from the window of a railway-carriage, the foreigner sees a pair of golfers solemnly following their ball from green to green; or when, from the stand at Lord's or the Oval, he spends five or six hours in the blazing sun patiently watching a county team score a hundred runs, he is overwhelmed by the impression that, according to the accepted saying, "the English take their pleasures seriously." The two diminutive figures on the golf-course proceed mechanically, without a gesture and seemingly without a word, on their appointed way. The thirteen white figures on the cricket-ground seem to stand in set attitudes, as if they had shared the fate of Lot's wife. One of them keeps on bowling, and the other keeps on blocking. At the "over" all the figures change sides, walking with the same stiff gravity as the golfers. It seems uncanny that such people should be playing, and not going through some pompous and elaborate ceremony. I remember hearing a schoolmaster shouting

to his boys during a football match: "Don't *play* with it!"—it of course meaning the ball—and wondering what such an exclamation could mean. I did not know then that it is only on the continent that games are *played*; in England they are *performed*, like a stage drama or some kind of religious rite. That is why cricket will never cross the frontiers of the British Empire. Its complicated evolutions and statuesque attitudes are reminiscent of the Greek Chorus. There are some slight differences, for the two wickets have replaced the one central altar and, up to the present, no singing has taken place. But it may yet come, and provide an ingenious means of brightening the game.

The fact that the English take their pleasures seriously does not in the least imply that they do not enjoy themselves. Quite the contrary. It is because they enjoy themselves so intensely that they are unable to waste any energy in external boisterousness. You cannot possibly laugh or even smile when you are setting your teeth to win. Besides, a game of cricket or of bridge is no laughing matter. The mere thought of your responsibility towards your partner is enough to bring your heart into your mouth. But there is more than that. There is the glory of victory and the humiliation of defeat. Every child, whatever its nationality, feels this and

believes deeply in the gospel of Let's Pretend and in the reality of illusion. Just as a doll is a real baby to her little mother, so is a game a real battle to every fighting boy. But England is the only country where this attitude of mind is preserved by the adult and where a man can be comforted for a money loss because he has shown himself particularly skilful at chess or on the cricket-field. The dream of mist prevails over the stern rationalism of sunshine. Unconsciously Hamlet's philosophy blurs the issue. Play is a dream, no doubt, but so perhaps is life.

I was very glad to ascertain the historical truth of a well-known incident which occurred during the Battle of Loos and which will doubtless be remembered by many of my readers. A British Tommy had wagered that, when the hour of the attack should strike, he would kick a football across No Man's Land right into the German trenches. When the story was carried along the lines, most of the French and Belgian soldiers who heard it questioned its veracity. The rest questioned the sanity of the daredevil who would jeopardise his life under shell-fire for the fun of indulging in a weak joke. Several years after the Armistice, I met an ex-officer who had been stationed in the neighbourhood at the time and who confirmed the incident,

expressing a certain astonishment at the emotion it had caused. Surely it was the right spirit in which to take things, and was it not far better to crack even such a poor joke than to lose one's head?

This may be an extreme case, but it is nevertheless an excellent illustration of the way in which the English purposely maintain an irrational attitude in order to preserve their mental balance. They simply refuse to reason with themselves as other people do, when the real world becomes too ghastly. They are never so determined as when they seem irresponsible, and never so sane as when they seem mad.[1]

The Loos story must be interpreted in the light of the scene between Lear and his Fool. While the king's insanity rages like the storm overhead, burning and tearing everything, the mock-madman keeps up a continual flow of mild jests and puns. In typical English fashion, he relieves the unbearable strain by dribbling the ball of his humour through the No Man's Land of his master's shattered soul.

[1] The perusal of the re-published *Wipers Times* affords many examples of this attitude of mind. The wonder is that such hilarity, far from being hysterical, succeeds in preventing or in curing hysteria.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LYRE[1]

WRITING of Shelley, and of *The Cloud* in particular, Francis Thompson says that this poem springs essentially from the faculty of make-believe. The child is still at play, " save only that his play is such as manhood stops to watch, and his playthings are those which the gods give their children. The universe is his box of toys. He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amidst the stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He teases into growling the kennelled thunder, and laughs at the shaking of its fiery chain. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven ; its floor is littered with his broken fancies. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world. He gets between the feet of the horses of the sun. He stands in the lap of patient Nature and twines her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions, to see how she will look nicest in his song."

[1] With the kind permission of Messrs. Chapman and Hall, certain passages from an article published in the *Edinburgh Review* (Jan., 1929) are included in this chapter.

I have quoted this passage at length, first of all because I had not the heart to mutilate it, but also because it illustrates admirably a certain imaginative quality which belongs doubtless to all poets but which is specially prominent among the English poets, because they are the most childlike and therefore the most poetical of poets.

Imagine a boy building his castle on the shore, while people pass to and fro along the beach; and suppose for one moment that his spade, instead of shovelling sand, should pile up walls of diamonds, towers of rubies, and battlements of emeralds. There would certainly come a moment when "manhood would stop to watch" and even cry aloud when the water rushing into the moat shone with the white, red and green glare of the gems. It is this kind of mad, irresponsible light which burns through the greatest pages of English poetry. You find it in the great Romanticists, in some confusing images of Spenser, in almost all those hard passages of Shakespeare against which so many reasonable critics, all the world over, have knocked their heads and generally cracked them.

When Keats speaks of the song

> that ofttimes hath
> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn,

he does not really mean that nightingales are fond of singing near the sea, and that, if they were, their song would be heard above the roar of breakers. He simply wishes to associate one inspired vision or harmony with another, and it is better to leave it at that.

The poet may for a long time weave his shining fabric on his loom, but there comes a moment—if he is really a great poet—when the most unexpected colours will come out of his shuttle and the strangest patterns glow across his warp. The astonished reader may be sure that his wonder will never be so great as that of the writer. The latter can only say, as Browning did: "Once two people knew what this meant: God and Browning. Now only God knows."

In these days of anthologies, it is strange that nobody has ever thought of collecting these supreme outbursts of poetical exhilaration, which are in themselves a challenge to reason. If the learned commentaries of critical authorities were appended to such a volume, it would include, under the same cover, the greatest monuments of human genius and of human foolishness, for there is nothing so foolish as to try and define in rational terms the wild wanderings of imagination.

There is a comic side to this subject which is

also essentially English. Of all the surprises I experienced in the course of my study of English literature, the most striking was the discovery of the poetry of nonsense. It appears, at first, in the limericks of Edward Lear, as more or less connected with nursery rhymes, and might be dismissed as a curious craze of the Victorian age. The popularity of *Alice* and of Lewis Carroll's lyrics was far more difficult to explain. When, finally, I was confronted with a weird crop of nonsense poems, solemnly written and solemnly published by the greatest writers of the day, as far apart from one another as Kipling and Belloc, Chesterton and de la Mare, I could only raise my hands in despair and give myself up for lost. How was I to explain the care lavished by some of the best modern English poets on a world of topsy-turvydom and freakishness, as difficult for a foreigner to understand as the most exclusive family joke? How could such books find a public ever ready to appreciate them and critics willing to devote to them extensive reviews in the most serious literary papers?

The problem seems all the more baffling to the foreign critic because the nonsensical meaning of this literature is strangely deliberate and assumes, in some instances, a very plausible aspect. When Chesterton writes :

> And the man that might have been I shall dance
> With the woman that might have been you,
> Under the world where a man remembers
> More than he ever knew,

he expresses a feeling which might have been the subject of one of those ultra-refined love poems which were so much the fashion thirty years ago. His *Song* is, nevertheless, as far remote from the nineteenth century symbol as from the eighteenth century epigram. It is the frank expression of a love from which both reason and sentiment seem to be excluded and which revels in a kind of supernatural and all-conquering laughter. It is beyond normal love, just as the Jabberwock, the Dong "with a luminous nose," and the Quangle Wangle are beyond normal creatures.

I was tempted, for a time, to attribute this phenomenon to a kind of literary mannerism, but the very lilt of the lines soon brought back to me an impression of overwhelming spontaneity. I realised that these pranks were not inspired by a disordered brain, but, on the contrary, by the boisterous health of a mind which could afford to wander not only along the roadside, but even right across the traffic. The explanation must evidently be sought elsewhere.

There seems little doubt that, like many excellent things, the poetry of nonsense was born in the

nursery, and that the attraction it still has for adult writers and readers is due to the hold that the nursery retains on them. The child possesses a powerful imagination, yet he moves in a narrow world. His only means of satisfying this imagination is either by " slipping through the crack " into a new world of dream and wonder, or by upsetting completely the conventional relations of the objects with which he comes into contact. The mice that Cinderella's godmother harnesses to the coach are no more fantastic than those which, in spite of their blindness, pursue the Farmer's Wife. There is no more magic in the Ogre's seven-league boots than in the shoe in which the Old Woman houses her family. In other words, the child-poet may either fly to the moon or compel the cow to jump over it.

I remember a kind old lady who gave me hospitality during a lecture tour which I had undertaken somewhere in the Midlands. She was the head of a Quaker family, and, like most Quakers, took her religion very seriously. We had family prayers in the morning, with the servants standing all round the room, and the old lady—who, for the occasion, had produced a pair of forbidding horn spectacles—read to us, in a strong deep voice, some obscure and awe-inspiring passages from the Revelation. I was duly impressed, but I must

confess that the experience made me rather uncomfortable. Judge of my surprise when, in the evening, as we were all sitting round the fire, the lady asked me abruptly whether I had ever read Lear's *Nonsense Songs*. I confessed that I knew and loved the *Limericks*, but that I had never heard of the *Songs*, whereupon my hostess took the same pair of forbidding spectacles out of their case, and, seizing a book that had evidently been placed there on purpose, proceeded to intone, in the same strong deep voice:

> Far and few, far and few,
> Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
> Their heads are green and their hands are blue,
> And they went to sea in a sieve.

The refrain was taken up again and again by the whole family, and I joined in, thrilled with the pleasure which a connoisseur must feel when he identifies a genuine masterpiece. I had discovered a new aspect of the English soul.

Another feature of English literature which is bound to strike the foreign critic is the number of prose writers who are able to express themselves equally well in verse. The majority of living authors, including Kipling, Chesterton, de la Mare, and Laurence Housman, are generally considered to be prose writers, but their poetry is of such value

that, almost in every case, they might just as well be reckoned as poets. Poets writing in prose may be found everywhere, since prose-writing has become today almost an economic necessity; but a verse-writing prose-writer is quite exceptional abroad, the field of poetry being considered, by successful authors, as a barren desert reserved to bold explorers. Generally speaking, poetry-writing requires some self-sacrifice. If a great number of English authors indulge in it, it is not necessarily because they are more devoted to their art than their foreign colleagues, but because they are driven in that direction by an irrepressible instinct. The example of Hardy, Stevenson, Macaulay, Kingsley and Walter Scott shows that this remark does not apply only to the present time.

This craving of English authors for poetry is another consequence of the race's childlike spirit. There is a saying according to which "a poet has died young in the breast of the most stolid." Stevenson adds that "in almost every case, this somewhat minor bard survives and is the spice of life to his possessors." Wordsworth's reference to the "clouds of glory" which every child brings to earth when he is born, is too well-known to need quotation, but it is worthy of mention that, on this point, Swinburne agrees with him:

Earth's creeds may be seventy-times seven
And blood have defiled each creed:
If of such be the Kingdom of Heaven
It must be Heaven indeed.

The Romanticists were not always conscious of the childlike nature of their inspiration. Their imagination was so deeply stirred by the glowing scenery of the Mediterranean and the picturesque trappings of the middle ages that they gave little attention to their immediate surroundings and to the magic of everyday life. The world might have appeared to them, according to Shelley's expression, "like echoes of an ante-natal dream," but it was not the simple world in which they spent their life.

This is no longer the case today. There is a curious eagerness among modern English poets to recognise their debt to the child, and even to hail him as their master; "There is a garden grey," declares de la Mare, "with mists of autumn-tide":

Along the lonely path
A little child like me,
With face, with hands like mine,
Plays ever silently;

. . . . .

And I am there alone;
Forlornly, silently,
Plays in the evening garden
Myself with me.[1]

[1] *Myself.*

For Chesterton, the crown of life is a glorious state of second childhood, from which all insincerities are swept away, but in which the powerful impressions of the first childhood, the awe inspired by night, the wonder inspired by day, remain unaltered.

It seems strange indeed that a poet like W. H. Davies, who has seen so much of the world as a Super-Tramp, should be driven into ecstacies by the most common flower or insect, or by the sight of horses jumping in a field, and should admit, when the day is done, that the child's experiences have been far more wonderful:

> My world this day has lovely been—
> But not like what the child has seen.

The present attitude of many modern poets in England—an attitude very different from that of their continental colleagues—is more or less akin to that of the so-called primitive painters in Italy or Flanders, who seem to be more attracted by the tufts of grass growing in the foreground of their pictures than by the hills in the distance. This kind of short-range vision, implying a minute care for detail, is thoroughly characteristic of English poetry today, as it is characteristic of children all over the world and at every period.

It is often said that if Rupert Brooke had not fallen a victim to the war, he would have been by

now the chief exponent of the movement. His work reveals, again and again, a boylike vision of life which makes the thought of his death all the more pathetic. I do not refer only to the last lines of *Grantchester:*

> Stands the church clock at ten to three,
> And is there honey still for tea?

but more particularly to the amazing list of objects quoted in *The Great Lover* as having aroused the poet's delight and admiration. This list was made by a man of twenty-seven, though certain of the items mentioned—such as the big engine, familiar smells and sounds, the edge of foam on the shore, "freshly-peeled sticks" and "glossy new horse-chestnuts"—might be chosen by a boy twenty years younger.

Modern English poets deal with home life in the same spirit, devoting the greatest attention to apparently trivial incidents, endowing inanimate objects with a secret, mysterious life, transposing once more into the language of mature years the impressions of their youth. When Harold Munro, for instance, describes the cat waiting for its milk at tea-time, he does not do so in an off-hand, superior kind of way, as if the subject were not worthy of his pen. He does it eagerly, almost solemnly, as if the cat were a kind of awe-inspiring monster which only

the magic of cold milk could pacify. When Drinkwater speaks of rows of apples in a loft, he does not mention them casually as if to add a touch of colour to his picture or even to give us the homely impression of a well-stored house. The apples are seen in the moonlight, in the peace of night, by a small boy impressed by the silence which pervades the house. They are not the apples of adult reality, but the apples of youthful dreams.

Any generalisation dealing with modern English poetry which did not take into account the works of John Masefield, would seem somewhat hasty and imperfect. At first sight, the author of *The Everlasting Mercy* is scarcely the kind of man who would fall into ecstacies before freshly-peeled sticks and glossy new horse-chestnuts. But we find, nevertheless, among his works a certain number of poems which reveal the same boylike spirit that inspires Rupert Brooke. This country has, during recent years, produced a series of narrative poems such as *Right Royal*, *Reynard the Fox*, and J. C. Squire's *Rugger Match*, which, if they were better known abroad, would arouse as much astonishment as *The Hunting of the Snark* or *Jabberwocky*. How can English writers devote thousands of lines to the description of a hunt, a steeplechase or a football match? How can their souls be moved and their

imaginations stirred by games and sports which, anywhere else but in England, would have no deep significance? Can such subjects be worthy of such efforts? From the English point of view, however, *Reynard* and *Right Royal* are not merely descriptions of hunting and racing; they are nothing less than great epics worthy of stirring the deepest emotions of the nation. It all comes from the English faculty of "taking pleasures seriously," and of refusing to separate by a strict barrier game and work, illusion and reality.

The present Poet Laureate joins hands with Pindar across the centuries, and the voice of modern England catches the echoes of Ancient Greece.

I have dwelt at some length on modern poetry because I have been struck over and over again by the unfairness of many English critics in this respect. I quite realise that a reader who has been brought up on Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and the great Romanticists, may prove difficult to please and be sorely tempted to contrast the greatness of the past with the rather uneven and confused productions of the present. But the foreigner who, before coming to this country, has followed closely the decadence of poetry in most continental countries, instead of being depressed by contemporary English works,

feels strangely comforted by the freshness and simplicity of their inspiration, and by the fact that they are still accessible to a very large public, including the youth of the schools. Instead of being divided into small coteries and expressing themselves in a more and more esoteric style, the best English poets of today have succeeded in keeping in contact with the people and in discovering new means of expression for the feelings and dreams of their time. When the worst is said of them, it cannot be denied that they are carrying on a tradition which seems lost almost everywhere else, and, if we take into consideration the tremendous odds against which every true and sincere poet is obliged to fight today, this alone is sufficient praise.

The poetical and imaginative instincts are so strong in the English that their expression is not restricted to verse. Their influence is noticeable over and over again in stories, novels, and even in that stronghold of realism, the modern stage.

In his *Figures of Modern Literature*, J. B. Priestley insists on the influence exerted by childish memories on the works of a large number of English men of letters: "Their prose fables turn back more and more to that bright, clear, significant past, still burning undimmed in the memory; almost unthinkingly the very houses and furniture they

describe are houses and furniture out of that boyhood; the old quaint figures come bobbing up again, the creatures of childish terror and wonder come creeping out of their holes ; and every tree and bird and figure will not only be as significant as they once were, but will actually become more significant."

This idea throws a new light on a number of problems with which the foreign student of English literature finds himself confronted. It is almost a tradition among English novelists of the past two centuries to start their story with the childhood of its hero or heroine, and again and again the touch of autobiography is plainly discernible in these early chapters. Dickens, who, in spite of English criticism, must remain from the European point of view the master of English prose, is so strongly affected by this tendency that he is almost unable to build up the character of a straightforward, normal adult hero. His books are crowded with children and children's visions. He has a child's sensitiveness and imagination. Like a child, he excels in the grotesque and the horrible, and only uses the rational vision of the grown-up as links of lead between rings of shining gold. Like a child again, he delights in introducing supernatural episodes into apparently realistic surroundings. The tradition started in *The Christmas Carol* and

carried on in the nineteenth century by Stevenson, has flourished in an extraordinary way during the past thirty years. It may be found in several of H. G. Wells' early miraculous and supernatural stories, in some tales by Kipling, in almost all the works of Walter de la Mare, in David Garnett's fantastic imaginings, not to mention Laurence Housman, E. M. Forster, Algernon Blackwood and others.

Turning to the theatre, we find the same extraordinary intrusion of the miraculous into normal everyday life pervading a large number of plays, such as Barrie's finest creations, Chesterton's *Magic*, Laurence Housman's *Possession*, Balderston and Squire's *Berkeley Square*, Lord Dunsany's *If*, and Sutton Vane's *Outward Bound*, some of which have proved great popular successes, thus showing that the English public is attuned to their strange moods. It is very doubtful whether plays of this kind would have met with the same reception in any other country. Theatre-goers are not usually prepared to see young ladies whisked away into fairyland, or to be transported from one century or one country into another, or to be kept a long time in doubt as to whether they are in this world or the next. Whenever a poetical play attracts some attention in foreign countries, it is either written in

verse with some incidental music, or confined to a distant plane, far remote from the familiar atmosphere of ordinary life. It is doubtful whether any Frenchman would ever think of putting on the stage the story of a young wife abducted by fairy spirits and returning to her home after a lapse of twenty years.[1] But if he did, he would feel compelled to adopt a very simple dialogue, in the style of Maeterlinck, without any attempt at humour or witticism, as the only means of retaining some unity of atmosphere. Barrie, on the contrary, frankly breaks this unity, leading us without transition from the domain of modern comedy into that of popular legend, and from the comfortable drawing-room, in which old friends squabble amicably over their hobbies, to the desert island haunted by mysterious spirits.

There is a dramatic moment, at the end of the first act of *Dear Brutus*, in which this contrast is emphasised in a very striking manner. The semi-magician, Lob, has just succeeded in inducing his guests to seek their "second chance" in the mysterious wood which has miraculously sprung from his garden, on St. John's Eve. Legs apart and hands in pockets, he remains on the threshold, his back to the public, facing the unknown. "He is terrified," writes Barrie, "yet quivers of rapture are running up and down his little frame." This

[1] Barrie: *Mary Rose*.

last touch reveals the attitude of a large number of English authors. Like Lob, they are somewhat scared to see their dreams come true. Like him, they are at the same time delighted with the excitement of adventure. Standing on the threshhold of reality, they look upon mystery with a kind of voluptuous fear.

But Lob—do not let us forget it—is merely a kind of white-haired Peter Pan, and his attitude is essentially childlike. Any normal child left to himself is never quite awake nor quite absorbed in his dreams, according to the adult meaning of these words. He runs constantly from Lob's magic wood to the matter-of-fact world of his nursery, and is inclined to leave some of the mud from the wood and some of its leaves on the floor. It is not merely a coincidence that writers like Barrie, de la Mare and Blackwood should have spent so many inspiring hours with children, and that the names of Chesterton, Belloc, Laurence Housman and A. A. Milne should be met with in children's annuals.

This predominance of the poetic and imaginative element in English life and literature is not allowed to pass unchallenged. English poets have not only, like their brothers all the world over, to contend with the materialistic tendencies of the modern world; but also with the prejudices of the aristocracy

according to which all manifestations of personal feeling, however sincere, are uncalled-for. To use André Maurois' words, "any exaggeration is considered in England to be the worst of vices, while coolness is a sign of noble birth. When the English are very unhappy, they hide it behind a mask of humour; when they are very happy they say nothing at all. And beneath it all, John Bull is terribly sentimental, which explains everything."

The more there is to say, the less reason there is for saying it. The very depth and sincerity of natural emotions forbid their spontaneous expression. The gentleman, who combines the restraint of the old nobleman with the sentimentality of the modern bourgeois, and who has been trained in school and out of school to hide his feelings behind an impassive countenance, has obviously no patience with the poet, who betrays the most holy secrets of the English soul and shamelessly tears away the veil behind which it is hidden.

Contrasting the character of the undergraduate Stubbs with that of the French artist Léon, in one of the *New Arabian Nights*, Stevenson shows how difficult it is for an Englishman to "embrace an artistic career" and to think it, as many foreigners do, one of the noblest callings in life. "For my part," declares Stubbs, "I admire the stars, and

like to have them shining—it's so cheery—but hang me if I had an idea it had anything to do with art."

Stubbs, like thousands of Englishmen of the same temperament, will go into business, but he will preserve, nevertheless, a fond memory of " the play, and music, and guitars and things," and they will become the hobbies of his middle-age.

This is no doubt the reason why England is less encumbered than any other country by a crowd of pathetic mediocrities who are unable to resist the lure of artistic fame, but it is also the reason why, whenever a boy feels himself compelled to paint or to write, he is faced with unexpected obstacles and is often driven to assume a rebellious attitude towards a society in which he seems to have no rightful place.

Whereas, in democratic France, certain poets, such as Lamartine and Hugo, became great popular heroes voicing the aspirations of the people in times of stress, like the prophets of old, a large proportion of English poets of genius, such as Byron, Shelley, Swinburne, and, more recently, D. H. Lawrence, were led, for one reason and another, to challenge public opinion at home or take refuge in self-exile. Their rebellion may not always have been justified, but the fact remains that the country which has produced the greatest European poets has not always

been a good mother to them. It is the old fight of the Lion against the Unicorn, of men of action and empire-founders against men of dreams and builders of castles in the air. A horse would have been made welcome, but the unicorn's horn stands in its way. It is a monstrous ornament which no well-bred animal should wear.

I sometimes try to imagine how the civilisation of European nations will be appreciated in the distant future, when their economic and political problems have lost all practical interest. Those critics of the future will not be particularly struck by the achievements of our engineering, or by our latest scientific discoveries; for both science and engineering will have made further progress, and the great results of today will only be appreciated in so far as they affect the greater results of tomorrow. It is also doubtful whether our most praiseworthy efforts in national or international politics will be judged with the indulgence they deserve, for it is only too easy to be wise after the event. But we may presume that more importance will be attached to the European contribution to mankind's treasure-house of thought, imagination and emotion, for these things are indeed immortal as is the spirit which they express. Italy and Belgium will, I suppose, be remembered for their paintings,

Germany for her music, France for her prose, and England for her poetry. There will come a day when the memory of Shakespeare and Shelley will be as precious to our descendants as the memory of Homer and Virgil is to us, and when mankind will agree with one voice that the greatest gifts of England to the world have been the poems written by a small band of her children.

Meanwhile, may not all friends of England hope that the Lion will forgive the Unicorn its horn, and that the Gentleman will look with more indulgence and understanding upon the eccentricities of the fantastic architects who, while building their castles in the air, succeed in adding imperishable stones to the monument of their country's glory.

EPILOGUE

THE French critic, Jules Lemaître, wishing to sum up the main characteristics of England, once composed the following litany: "England, tough race, roast-beef, gin, tea, insularity, sport. . . . Keepsakes, home, parliamentarianism, loyalism, religious feeling, Bible, Salvation Army, English Sunday. . . . Land of bars, cars, coaches and bow-windows."

Not being Jules Lemaître, I have not attempted in this short record of personal experiences to treat so wide a range of subjects; but I am inclined to think that the following litany would be equally helpful to the foreigner, if he would only repeat it as a daily prayer throughout his stay in England:

Mist, lumber-rooms, country-houses, sheep; mist, after-dinner speeches, freedom, dole; mist, Round Table, social ladder, Olympus; mist, Robinson Crusoe, autograph-albums; mist, Pegasus, castles-in-the-air.

An analogy is not an explanation, but it is nevertheless comforting to the mind, when moving in a tangle of paradoxes and contradictions, to find

at least a common link binding these contradictions together. The old castle of the fairy tales had innumerable doors, both small and large, gold, bronze, iron, or even simply wood; and Bluebeard's wife used to wander through its passages dangling an enormous bunch of keys. In spite of all my efforts, I was not able to reduce the number of England's doors in Grecian, Gothic and Eastern styles. I was even obliged to blow my horn to get the gatekeeper to lower the drawbridge over the moat. But I believe that in my wanderings I found a small key, entangled in a web of gossamer. It is certainly very small and wonderfully light, but it happens to fit almost all the locks of the castle. It admits me to the dining-room, where people eat second-rate cooking from first-rate plates; to the spotless sanctuary of the bathroom, more luxurious than the hall; to the small talk of the sitting-room, in which the giants of the race juggle with precious cups and saucers; to the hot, subterraneous servants' quarters, where the gentleman-butler discusses with the lady cook the affairs of the gentry upstairs, and where the tweeny and the boots crack their jokes; to the desert of the billiard-room, entirely devoted to the worship of one elephantine hobby; to the picture gallery lined with family portraits; to the library crowded with gorgeous and

neglected books; even to the picturesque medley of the box-room, where the sports arsenal of three generations fraternises with the most intimate household relics.

I do not know who lost this key, though I suspect Queen Mab. It is essentially different from all continental keys, for it must be pushed into the lock upside-down, and turned towards the latch instead of away from it. In fact, it is topsy-turvy and nonsensical, it explains a good deal but cannot be explained.

When once the fundamental truth of English irrationality has been well mastered, we may safely wander through the devious avenues of the country's history, and see yesterday merging into today, while today keeps a strong hold on tomorrow. We can watch the upper-classes maintaining their position, while their privileges are encroached upon by the people. We can observe the chosen nation sending its swarms all over the world, to found free nations in the conquered lands. We find liberty enslaving the poor, and gentleness breaking the prison doors. We discover that work may be a pleasure, and that pleasure is almost as exacting as work. The gentleman leads us to his hobby, and his hobby leads us to the child within him. And within the child lies the poet.

But this idea of irrationality, if it is to become truly illuminating, must be handled gently. Irrationality means instinct, but it also means intuition. It brings us closer to the animals, on the one side, and to the angels on the other. When Keyserling, in propounding his theory of the English animal-man, declares that "a profound, clearly-formulated thought does not fit into the framework of English life," he only states one half of the truth, and the less valuable one.[1] The fact that the English distrust the dictates of reason does not imply that they neglect it. It simply means that they put it in its proper place, and look upon it not as an ultimate goal, but as an instrument which must be used, with others, to reach this goal. One of the greatest services rendered by English writers to European thought has been to show that cleverness is not necessarily the greatest attribute of the human mind. Professor Whitehead, in *Science and the Modern World*, insists on the important part played by Bishop Berkeley in the eighteenth century, and by the Romantic poets—particularly Wordsworth and Shelley—in the nineteenth, in reacting against the purely intellectual and scientific scheme favoured in their time. It is obviously impossible here to enquire how far such tendencies can be connected

[1] *Europe*, page 20.

with Platonic idealism, on the one hand, and with the latest developments of modern philosophy, on the other, but, in view of the exaggerations indulged in by certain critics, it may be useful to point out here that the mist-analogy only applies in so far as it suggests that clear visibility is not essential to the truth—or to the beauty—of a landscape, and that the human vision may be blurred by an accumulation of details just as it may be hindered by a dense fog. English thought strikes the balance between the two extremes, and vindicates intuition from the contempt of rationalist criticism. It enlarges the human intelligence by calling into play all its faculties and forcing imagination, as well as observation and analysis, into the service of understanding. Turner's mind was no doubt different from that of the lady who, looking at one of his pictures, declared that she had " never seen a sunset like that," but the painter was perfectly justified in answering : " Don't you wish you had ? "

In writing this book I have been struck again and again by the fact that certain contrasts existing between English life and the life of most continental nations are no longer so noticeable today as they were twenty years ago, and there seems no doubt that these differences must have been still more strongly felt in the nineteenth century than at the beginning

of the twentieth. We may therefore ask ourselves whether English peculiarities are not more or less on the wane, and whether a time will not come when they will disappear altogether? Many of these peculiarities are based on the maintenance of an aristocratic standard, and, to a lesser degree, on the influence of an individualistic religion. The action of both these factors seems bound to decrease with the ever-growing influx of the lower into the upper classes and with the gradual transformation of religious thought from the prejudices of fanaticism to the tolerance of sympathetic understanding.

The economic crisis which is impoverishing the old families and the spiritual crisis which, by reducing the social prestige of the churches, brings all sincere believers closer together, are gradually lowering the barrier between classes and denominations and attenuating the insular character of English life. Education of the type represented by the old public schools and universities is strongly affected. The complete autonomy of the Dominions, the gradual emancipation of India, are bound to react on the development of English character by reducing the number of colonists and settlers of the old type and weakening the spirit of adventure.

The situation established by the industrial revolution is altering fast. England is no longer

the perfect type of an over-industrialised country living on exports and pinning her faith to free trade. Safeguarding is already here, and Protection is coming in one form or another. If a revival of agriculture follows, which seems probable, the balance of the nation's economic life may, to a great extent, be restored, and the old yeoman may once again come into his own.

It has often been remarked that, in the sixteenth century, English life and manners were far less different from those of the continent than they are in modern times. This change has been attributed to the action of the Puritan Revolution, which has frequently been exaggerated, and to the fact that England kept aloof from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic régime, a fact which has not sufficiently been taken into account. Everything points towards a return to a similar situation. But this does not mean that England will ever find herself in the same position as other European nations. Her distinct character can be traced as far back as the middle ages and is already very apparent in Elizabethan days. If we were trying to represent graphically the course of past and future changes, we might say that the life of England and that of the rest of Europe, which ran on parallel lines up to the middle of the seventeenth century and which have

drawn apart during the last two centuries, are gradually tending to resume their former relative positions. This assumption is strengthened if we consider that the general trend of interest and thought in France, Germany and other Western European countries favours such a movement, for English culture and customs are certainly far better appreciated today than ever before in modern times.

The old idea of Merrie England vanishing behind a pall of Puritan gloom is definitely exploded, together with the legend of English "spleen." If the natural humour of the people has from time to time been damped by waves of stern fanaticism, it is not because they were naturally disposed to sacrifice an innocent appetite for the good things of life to the vain satisfaction of religious pride, but, on the contrary, because their buoyancy and exuberance were such that they could well afford to repress them when led to do so by a natural reaction against self-indulgence. England has, in fact, never ceased to be merry. Like the poetry of Milton, she can reprove with one breath and laugh with the other. She possesses the childlike faculty of repenting bitterly for her sins at one moment and romping and skipping at the next. She is the chosen land of games, practical jokes, humorous songs and folk-dances. Humour is not, with her, a popular quality

or a feature of school life; it pervades all classes and all ages; it is the best encouragement for work, and the most effective screen for shyness; it challenges danger and defies the Fates; it has been immortalised in English literature by the greatest poet of the Renaissance and the greatest prose writers of the Classic and Romantic periods, and it seems strange indeed that critics should persist in talking of the depressing impassivity of the English, while the colossal laughter of Shakespeare, Fielding and Dickens roars in their stubborn ears.

True melancholy belongs to southern climates, where humour and imagination are paralysed by the dreadful distinctness of every feature of the landscape, and where people live in constant fear of being taken in by false appearances. But, in this windswept and rain-lashed island of the North, every cloud brings new dreams with it, every downpour is a new baptism, the faintest ray of sun heralds new promises; and, in the hearts of these cool and sedate islanders, joy sings with such irrepressible optimism and confidence is so contagious that the worst crisis breeds the longest patience and that the hardest obstacles encourage the finest efforts.

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